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"They opened the door too late": African Americans and baseball, 1900-1947

Sarah L. Trembanis
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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“THEY OPENED THE DOOR TOO LATE”

African Americans and Baseball, 1900-1947

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Lyon Gardiner Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

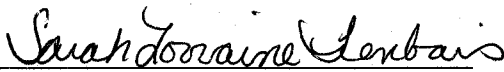
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Sarah Lorraine Trembanis

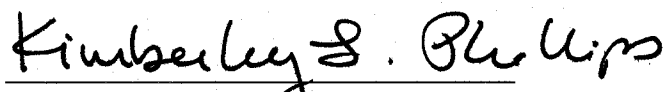
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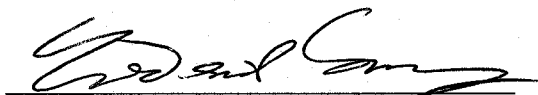
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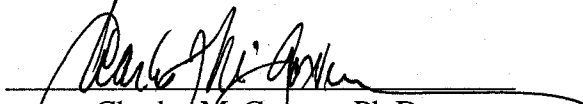

Sarah Lorraine Trembanis


Approved by the Committee, August 2006


Kimberley L. Phillips, Ph.D. and Chair


Frederick Corney, Ph.D.


Cindy Hahamovitch, Ph.D.


Charles McGovern, Ph.D.


Leisa Meyer, Ph.D.

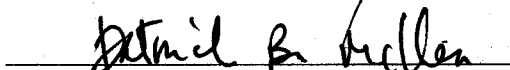

Patrick B. Miller, Ph.D., Professor
Northeastern Illinois University

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Acknowledgments have always been my favorite thing to read in any book or dissertation. I love how they serve as a glimpse into the author's personality as well as a record of the creation of a piece of work. Yet, at the same time, I find myself struggling to write my own. One does not survive seven years of graduate study without amassing significant debts to a large number of people; however, traditional words of thanks do not seem sufficient repayment for the kindness that has been shown to me over the years. That being said, I will do my best to do justice to the many colleagues, friends, and family to whom I am incredibly grateful.

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studied subjects far removed from my dissertation subject, but their encouragement and patience as I worked toward the defense were a wonderful gift.

During my year of crafting a first complete draft, I lived in beautiful Falmouth on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. While there, I wrote every morning at Coffee Obsession in Woods Hole. The Coffee O staff was always friendly and very patient with a customer who bought tea and took up too much space with her books and computer. They made the writing experience a vastly more pleasurable one than it might have been. While in Falmouth, we were also fortunate to make wonderful friends, friends who were all-too-familiar with the struggles of balancing academic/work obligations with family life. To Peter, Linda, and Nico Traykovski and to Chris, Patty, Sarah, and Rita Sherwood, thank you for welcoming us and commiserating with me.

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On a daily basis, two people contributed to the completion of this dissertation, my husband Art and my daughter Ella. Art, who understood the demands of a dissertation, pitched in at every opportunity. He washed dishes and watched Ella so that I could squeeze in a few more minutes of work. He ferried me to and from coffeeshops in icy New England weather so that I could have a cozy place to write. He took significant time off from his own work (in his first, busy year) so that I could have long work sessions at the library. He took over Ella's morning routine so that I could get out and recharge myself by running long miles through Newark. He listened to rambling discussions of culture, agency, folklore, and nicknames and always seemed interested. Most of all, he has been my biggest fan. Art has trumpeted my work to friends, family, colleagues, and complete strangers. When I struggled under the weight of the dissertation, Art always reminded me that there was no room for "ifs." Anytime that I said, "if I finish," Art corrected me and said "when." For all of his help, love, and confidence, I will forever be thankful. For believing in me and this work when I myself was weary and unsure, I will always be grateful.

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ABSTRACT

During Jim Crow, the sport of baseball served as an important arena for African American resistance and negotiation. As a (mostly) black enterprise, the Negro Leagues functioned as part of a larger African American movement to establish black commercial ventures during segregation. Moreover, baseball's special status as the national pastime made it a significant public symbol for African American campaigns for integration and civil rights.

This dissertation attempts to interrogate the experience and significance of black baseball during Jim Crow during the first half of the twentieth century. Relying on newspapers, magazines, memoirs, biographies, and previously published oral interviews, this work looks at resistance and political critique that existed in the world of black sport, particularly in the cultural production of black baseball.

Specifically, this dissertation argues that in a number of public and semi-public arenas, African Americans used baseball as a literal and figurative space in which they could express dissatisfaction with the strictures of Jim Crow as well as the larger societal understanding of race during the early twentieth century. African Americans asserted a counter-narrative of black racial equality and superiority through their use of physical space in ballparks and on the road during travel, through the public negotiation of black manhood on the pages of the black press, through the editorial art and photography of black periodicals, and through the employment of folktales and nicknames.

The African American experience during Jim Crow baseball and the attendant social and cultural production provide a window into the subtle and unstated black resistance to white supremacy and scientific racism. Thus this dissertation explores and identifies the political meanings of black baseball.

**“THEY OPENED THE DOOR TOO LATE:” AFRICAN AMERICANS AND
BASEBALL, 1900-1947.**

INTRODUCTION

"A Jim-Crow Affair": Negro League Baseball¹

During the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans grappled with how to define and negotiate black baseball within the confines of Jim Crow. This dissertation explores the intersections among African American life, sport (in this instance, baseball), culture, and racial identity politics in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, I look at four arenas through which baseball provided a forum for African Americans to negotiate the meaning of race under Jim Crow. African Americans used baseball to construct and challenge early twentieth-century access to public and semi-public spaces, definitions of black manhood, visual depictions of black athletes, and black vernacular discursive strategies. Within these four literal and figurative spaces, African Americans confronted and challenged the strictures of segregation, the ambiguity of racial classification and identity, white supremacist stereotypes and theories, and political ideologies.

¹ *Chicago Defender* editorial as cited in *The Crisis*, June 1940, 180.

In order to fully understand the implications of black baseball for African Americans, one first needs a brief history of black baseball in the U.S. The story of black baseball is not a static history of an established league. Instead, over the more than seventy years of its organized existence, beginning in 1885 and officially ending in 1960, black baseball ebbed and flowed as new leagues and teams continually formed and disbanded in response to various economic and social conditions, as well as in response to the maneuvers of high-powered team owners.² In particular, the vagaries of Jim Crow society greatly influenced the history of professional black baseball. As organized black baseball began in earnest at the same time that segregation was codified in the South and ended a few years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954, the major events that formed, maintained, and challenged racially-based segregation similarly marked black baseball. World War I, the Great Migration, the New Negro and Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, the Great Depression, and World War II each had a significant impact on the fortunes (and bankruptcies) of black baseball squads.

African Americans have played baseball since the inception and growth of the sport concurrent with the Civil War and postbellum urbanization and technological advances.³ A few African American men managed to compete in professional baseball

² Almost every scholarly and popular book on the Negro Leagues has utilized a slightly different time frame, reflecting the various authors' different perspectives. Consequently, the field lacks a standard time frame. For the purposes of this discussion, I mark the beginning of black organized baseball with the founding of the professional and all-black Cuban Giants baseball team in 1885 and mark the end of professional black baseball with the dissolution of the Negro American League in 1960.

³ On the rise of baseball as an American sport, see John R. Betts, "The Technological Revolution and The Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (September 1953), 232; George B.

prior to the exclusion of blacks from the major leagues in 1889. Bud Fowler played for a number of small-semiprofessional traveling teams in the 1870s and 1880s.⁴ Moses “Fleetwood” Walker became the first African American major league baseball player when he suited up as catcher for Toledo as part of the American Association in 1884. A few other players, including Walker’s brother Weldon, followed in his footsteps.⁵ Integrated baseball, however, was short-lived.

In 1887, Cap Anson, an influential player-manager and future Hall of Fame member, refused to play against an integrated team. His refusal to compete against an integrated team was not new; he had made similar, unfulfilled threats in 1884. This time, however, Anson found a more favorable reception for his segregationist stance. The ten-member International League met in July of 1887 and voted to prohibit member teams from signing future contracts with black players. The vote was 6-4, with the six all-white teams voting in the majority.⁶ Shortly after this decision, a number of other professional leagues, most of which already practiced informal segregation, upheld or

Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 113-129; Benjamin C. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2nd edition, 2002), 2, 5-30; Mark Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues, 1884-1955* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1995), 13; William J. Ryczek, *When Johnny Came Sliding Home: The Post-Civil War Baseball Boom, 1865-1870* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1998), 72-74.

⁴ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 16-17

⁵ David W. Zang, *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 37-40, 61; Jules Tygiel, *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 53-55.

⁶ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 31-32.

instituted bans against black baseball players.⁷ Jules Tygiel has attributed these increasingly formalized color bans in professional baseball to a larger, late century focus on “professionalism.” In this “culture of professionalism,” baseball players and owners tried to use ‘racial and ethnic exclusion to define the distinctiveness of a given profession.’”⁸ For Walker and the other International League black ball players, this new rule signaled the end of their careers in major league baseball. Although the new regulation did not terminate current contracts with black players, the atmosphere on the integrated league teams was not welcoming in 1888. One player (George Stovey) was released from his contract prior to the start of the 1888 season, two others (Bud Fowler and Bob Higgins) resigned midseason in the face of vitriolic abuse from teammates and spectators, and a fourth player, Frank Grant, requested a raise after completing a strong season and was consequently denied a salary increase and let go. As the 1889 season approached, only one black player, Fleetwood Walker, remained in the professional leagues. Walker played a portion of the 1889 season and then resigned, officially beginning an almost sixty-year period during which the professional leagues would only employ white players.

African Americans, however, were not willing to merely step aside and stay out of organized baseball altogether. All-black teams and leagues were established in the 1860s, primarily on the Eastern Seaboard.⁹ Other early black teams, often composed of

⁷ Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, 55.

⁸ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 14-15.

⁹ The Pythians of Philadelphia, led by Octavius Catto, were the most notable of these early black baseball teams. They were, however, victims of the racial politics of the time. The National Association of Base

hotel or restaurant employees, competed against each other in resort areas such as Long Island and Atlantic City, drawing crowds of baseball fans.¹⁰ Meanwhile, a fledgling league was established in the South. Consisting of ten teams, the southern league competed in 1886 and established clubs in major southern cities, including Memphis, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Despite some positive notice in the press, the southern leagues folded at the end of the year, with its member teams unable to support themselves financially.¹¹ In general, these early teams and leagues lacked an overarching power structure and firm financial footing. Consequently, teams encountered significant scheduling difficulties and were unable to sponsor a legitimate championship.¹²

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, black baseball increasingly made its mark in northern urban centers. A small but growing number of teams regularly competed in cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago, facing other professional and

Ball Players (NABBP) denied the Pythians membership and recognition. Although the Pythians persevered without NABBP recognition, they folded after the murder of Catto in 1871. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 12-15; Christopher Threston, *The Integration of Baseball in Philadelphia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), 8-10.

¹⁰ The Cuban Giants were the most notable black team of the 1880s. Michael E. Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901: Operating By Any Means Necessary* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 50-53.

¹¹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 20-21.

¹² Prior to Rube Foster, black teams joined semiprofessional and minor level-integrated leagues (all white teams vs. all black teams) and competed as part of smaller, citywide leagues. These league memberships were often short-lived and unsatisfactory for black teams, which often operated independently. Foster was the first to successfully craft an all-black professional baseball league. For more information on early league attempts, see Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, 61-149.

semiprofessional clubs. The owners, both black and white, of these clubs formed casual alliances and arranged games under the supervision of promoters and booking agents. It was during this early stage of black baseball that a true star emerged. Rube Foster, a pitcher with the Leland Giants, compiled an overwhelming win-loss record and brought a number of new fans to the game. Still, blackball owners were unwilling or unable to establish themselves as a league and frequently raided other black baseball teams for their stars.¹³ Thus, even as black baseball grew in popularity, the instability of the institution threatened its survival.

Meanwhile, the advent of World War I had implications for African American communities and black baseball. As national immigration policies slowed the influx of European workers into the industrial cities of the North, increasing numbers of African Americans migrated from the South in search of greater opportunities and a more welcoming racial climate. The majority of these migrants were young men seeking jobs in the steel mills and factories of cities like Chicago, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. In many cases, these early male migrants sought to establish themselves before sending for their family members to join them in the North. As young black men, these migrants often served as players on many of the community baseball teams sponsored by local churches and business. Those who did not play most likely attended local baseball contests as spectators.

This increase in black urban populations in the north, ushered in with the first waves of the Great Migration, created a favorable environment for the creation of an

¹³ On the intricacies of black baseball maneuvers during the first two decades of the twentieth century, see Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 40-104.

organized black baseball league.¹⁴ Moreover, the push for greater racial equality domestically that accompanied returning black U.S. soldiers fostered a sense of solidarity for black businesses that benefited a fledgling black leisure enterprise.¹⁵

In 1920, Rube Foster capitalized on both the increasing popularity of black baseball and the growing urban black populations, establishing the Negro National League.¹⁶ Foster was motivated to begin a league to ensure that his Chicago American Giants had good, regular competition and to institute contractual obligations that would prevent other teams from raiding players or venues for their own personal gain.¹⁷ Foster

¹⁴ Although southern cities would re-establish black baseball teams in the 1930s, none attained the level of success or popularity held by northern ball clubs. A further discussion of regional differences in black baseball can be found in Chapter One.

¹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois's provocative *Crisis* editorial, "Returning Soldiers," reflected a growing desire upon the part of the African American intelligentsia to fight for equality after World War I. See Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers" *The Crisis* XVIII (May 1919), 13. Du Bois's initial stance on African American involvement in World War I was complicated and problematic. See Mark Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I" *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 96-124; William Jordan, "'The Damnable Dilemma': African American Accommodation and Protest During World War I" *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1562-1583; Ellis, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Formation of Black Political Thought in World War I: A Commentary on 'The Damnable Dilemma'" *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1584-1590.

¹⁶ For an examination of Foster's earlier forays into organized black baseball in Chicago, see Michael E. Lomax, "Black Entrepreneurship in the National Pastime: The Rise of Semiprofessional Baseball in Black Chicago" in Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins, eds., *Sport and Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 25-44.

¹⁷ Robert C. Cottrell, *Blackball, the Black Sox, and the Babe: Baseball's Crucial 1920 Season* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002), 142-153. One of the other founding members of the Negro National

believed that black baseball could grow and prosper as a collective enterprise, bringing in greater numbers of fans and employing the best black talent.¹⁸ Foster also resented the power of white booking agents like Nat Strong and sought to assert a leadership role for African Americans in black baseball.¹⁹

Foster also hoped to take advantage of local movements that encouraged African Americans to patronize black enterprises whenever possible. Publicly, Foster promoted his Negro National League as a black business in order to attract positive publicity and loyal fans. This strategy had its benefits, particularly in Chicago, where black leaders, including Beauregard Moseley, a Foster associate, had established the Leland Giants Baseball and Amusement Association in order to build and maintain black-owned

League, C.I. Taylor, felt the same pressures as Foster. In a 1920 article he noted that “[w]e will never have playing grounds until we can get an organization of such strength as to enable us to procure them, and to guarantee the public a standard schedule of games on those grounds after we get them.” Taylor also detailed the difficulties owners encountered in dealing with players who lacked meaningful contracts. Taylor, “The Future of Colored Baseball” *The Competitor* (February 1920), 76-79, quote 76.

¹⁸ A counterpart to Foster’s Chicago-based Negro National League soon developed. In 1922, Hilldale (Philadelphia) owner Ed Bolden established the Eastern Colored League to provide a home league for Eastern black clubs. Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 5; Threston, *The Integration of Baseball in Philadelphia*, 31-32.

¹⁹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 72-73. Strong maintained his importance as a booking agent for the Negro Leagues and white semipro teams despite Foster’s disdain. Although other black baseball owners shared Foster’s dislike of Strong, Strong’s connections made him invaluable to the survival of Negro League teams, especially during the difficult Depression years. Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 9. Black sportswriters mentioned Strong as a symbol of undue white influence in the black game. Ira F. Lewis, “‘New’ League Not Needed” *The Competitor* (May 1921), 39 and 41.

recreational facilities, including a proposed ballpark.²⁰ The 1920 timing was also fortuitous for Foster. Although black enterprise building had first become popular in Chicago at the turn of the century, it had even more appeal during the 1920s.²¹ Nationally, Marcus Garvey was gaining great popularity and extolling the virtues of black enterprise and black racial purity and Foster's stated desire to build a racially pure black institution complemented Garvey's rhetoric.²² Yet, privately, Foster focused primarily on establishing black baseball as a profitable business with little concern for the racial background of those he needed to ensure financial success for the fledgling league.²³

²⁰ One of the main proponents of the Leland Giants Baseball and Amusement Association, Beauregard F. Moseley, tried and failed to establish the National Negro Baseball League in 1910. Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 117.

²¹ On the tensions between integrationist and segregationist camps in Chicago's African American community, see Spear, *Black Chicago*, 51-55.

²² Even Foster's motto, "We are the Ship, All Else the Sea" echoed Garvey's Black Star Line and his Back to Africa campaign. On Garvey, see E. David Cronon, ed., *Marcus Garvey* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973); Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggle of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

²³ Foster's difficulties in balancing his business relationships and his public call for black baseball to be a race enterprise will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

Throughout the Negro League era (1920-1960), leagues formed and disbanded frequently.²⁴ Foster's own Negro National League fell on hard times after Foster's 1926 illness and subsequent death. Without Foster's strong, controlling presence, the league lacked the necessary leadership to continue and folded in 1931.²⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, black baseball fell into a set pattern. Team owners would collaborate as a league only to break apart as they began to bicker over player contracts and scheduling. The details differed based on the circumstances and personalities involved but the outcome was always the same- a folded league or a severely damaged league that was a shadow of its former self.

The Great Depression provided yet another obstacle for black baseball as an institution. According to Neil Lanctot, the Depression allowed white booking agents and "black underworld figures" (i.e. number runners) to gain a foothold into black baseball. With expendable incomes scarce, attendance numbers dropping, and personal financial resources strained, team owners began to cut salaries and travel costs, scrimping everywhere they could.²⁶ Forced to adapt to a new economic environment, teams welcomed the deep pockets of number runners like Gus Greenlee, who established a

²⁴ Black baseball as a phenomenon existed prior to this era. During this forty-year period, however, professional black baseball achieved a level of organization that made it a more recognizable institution. Although the various leagues that we now collectively refer to as the Negro Leagues were in flux throughout this time, most owners and officials recognized the need for an overarching structure and the oversight of a league corporation. Consequently, few teams attempted to operate outside of the confines of a league.

²⁵ Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 9.

²⁶ Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 9, 16-18.

Negro League team in Pittsburgh. In order to maximize their ability to reach fans, the Kansas City Monarchs and the Pittsburgh Crawfords began playing night games.

Perhaps the most significant innovation, however, was the establishment of the East-West All Star Game. The East-West game quickly became one of the highlights of the year for black sport fans. Held in Chicago, the game brought together the best Negro League stars and most crucially, reignited the interest of black baseball's fan base.²⁷

The success of the East-West All Star Game, slow improvement of general economic conditions, and support from the black press along with the financial influx from new owners allowed black baseball to survive the Great Depression. By 1939, fans started to return to the ballparks, bringing a more steady revenue stream to the financially-strained clubs.²⁸ Still, Negro League baseball could not be described as particularly stable or economically secure. The long, difficult Depression years had left their toll on most black baseball teams and owners. World War II, however, would bring with it a change in circumstances for black baseball and African Americans in general.

Unlike white major league baseball, which was decimated by the loss of key players to the war effort, Negro League baseball thrived during the war years.²⁹ Increased employment among African Americans translated into higher attendance

²⁷ Ribowsky has argued that because of the constant ebb and flow of players from team to team, "the strength of the black game consisted of its transcendent stars." *A Complete History*, 177.

²⁸ Lancot has noted that despite the lessening of the Depression, most African Americans still lacked the expendable income necessary to attend games on a regular basis. Lancot, *Negro League Baseball*, 84, 95.

²⁹ As did women's professional baseball. See Susan E. Johnson, *When Women Played Hardball* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1994); Patricia Vignola, "'The Patriotic Pinch Hitter: The AAGBL and How American Woman Earned a Permanent Spot on the Roster.'" *Nine* 12 (February 2004): 102-113.

numbers for black baseball teams as did the growing African American population in northern urban centers. On the field, black clubs were able to field competitive teams with star players due to the fact that the Negro Leagues allowed players to compete long past the age when most white ballplayers had retired.

The success of black baseball during World War II was a double-edged sword. Coffers were full, players were well-compensated, and fans were enthusiastic. At the same time, however, increasing numbers of African Americans, as part of the Double V Victory campaign, advocated for an end to segregated institutions. Clearly, black baseball, with its call for race patronage, did not easily fit into this agenda.³⁰ Although fans did not immediately abandon black baseball, the black press and community leaders devoted their time and resources to the campaign to integrate the major leagues.

As the growing popularity of black baseball, a change in commissioner, and a slightly more tolerant post-war racial climate coincided with calls for integration from both the black and white press, major league officials finally and publicly denounced the unwritten color line. This change in policy opened the door for Branch Rickey to sign Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946. In 1947, after a minor league season, Robinson entered Ebbets Field as the first African American major leaguer since Fleetwood Walker in 1889.³¹

Larry Doby, Monte Irvin, and other Negro League stars soon followed in Robinson's footsteps and black fans were not far behind. Black fans were eager to see

³⁰ Lanctot covers this tension in detail. *Negro League Baseball*, 96-100,

³¹ On Jackie Robinson, see Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

their baseball idols compete in a formerly forbidden arena and threw their support wholeheartedly behind these integrating pioneers. Patronizing black enterprises was no longer viewed as a contribution to racial success or uplift, instead African Americans fought for integrated schools, transportation, and leisure spaces.³² Black baseball quickly lost its importance for many African Americans. Plagued by waning interest on the part of fans, the last all-black baseball league folded in 1960.³³

A number of historians and sportswriters have examined the black baseball experience. The earliest works covering the Negro Leagues attempted to make visible the seemingly forgotten story of black baseball and its stars. In *Only the Ball was White* and *Invisible Men*, Robert Peterson and Donn Rogosin recounted the terrific athletic accomplishments of Negro League players while bringing to light the atrocious conditions under which they toiled.³⁴ These works, along with a number of biographies and autobiographies, successfully introduced the names of players like Josh Gibson to general readers of sport history.³⁵ At the same time, documentary efforts by John Holway

³² This change in ideology was actually a return to the more integrationist philosophy of late nineteenth-century African American leaders. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 51-54.

³³ The Kansas City Monarchs and Indianapolis Clowns held on as barnstorming teams until 1963 and 1965, respectively. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 314.

³⁴ Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984); Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Kodansha International, 1983, 1995).

³⁵ William Brashler, *Josh Gibson: A Life in the Negro Leagues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Monte Irvin with James A. Riley, *Monte Irvin: Nice Guys Finish First* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers,

and Brent Kelley preserved the oral histories of black baseball stars, preserving their memories for future readers and researchers.³⁶ Others, captivated by this previously missing history, worked to collect statistics in order to validate claims of the athletic

Inc., 1996); Wilmer Fields, *My Life in the Negro Leagues* (Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1992); Buck Leonard with James A. Riley, *Buck Leonard The Black Lou Gehrig: The Hall of Famer's Story in His Own Words* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc, 1995); Effa Manley and Leon Herbert Hartwick, *Negro Baseball...Before Integration* (Chicago, Adams Press, 1976); Kyle P. McNary, *Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe: 36 Years of Pitching and Catching in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (Minneapolis: McNary Publishing, 1994); Buck O'Neil with Steve Wulf and David Conrads, *I Was Right on Time: My Journey from the Negro Leagues to the Majors*. (New York: Fireside Books, 1997); James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Methuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1993); LeRoy (Satchel) Paige as told to David Lipman, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever: A Great Baseball Player tells the Hilarious Story Behind the Legend* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962, 1993); Ellen Rendle, *Judy Johnson: Delaware's Invisible Hero* (Wilmington, DE: The Cedar Tree Press, 1994); Mark Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Ribowsky, *The Power and the Darkness: The Life of Josh Gibson in the Shadows of the Game* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Frazier "Slow" Robinson and Paul Bauer, *Catching Dreams: My Life in the Negro Baseball League* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Quincy Troupe, *20 Years Too Soon: Prelude to Major League Integrated Baseball* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1995, 1977).

³⁶ Stephen Banker, *Black Diamonds: An Oral History of Negro Baseball*, Cassette Tapes. (Washington: Tapes for Readers, 1978, 1992); John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*; Holway, *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1988); Brent Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues: Conversations with 52 Baseball Standouts of the Period 1924-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1998).

achievements of black ball players and lobby for their inclusion in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.³⁷

Most of the more recent full-length works either take a strict regional approach or examine the institutional history of the Negro Leagues. The regional manuscripts have provided a much-needed local context for the day-to-day operations of clubs such as the Homestead Grays, Kansas City Monarchs, and Hilldale Daisies.³⁸ Other larger works have taken the approach of exploring the Negro Leagues as a black business and

³⁷ Groups like SABR (Society for American Baseball Research) have been particularly active in finding and collating statistics from the Negro Leagues. Although black newspapers covered negro league action, they did not have sufficient staff or resources to send writers on the road with the teams. As a result, box scores were often missing or provided limited information. Critics have alleged that even the extant statistics are flawed because black players rarely competed against white major leaguers. In 2006, an expert committee, commissioned by Major League Baseball, studied the records and accomplishments of black players, managers, and owners from the Jim Crow Era. The committee recommended that 17 Negro Leaguers be admitted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. This group of 17 included the first female member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, Effa Manley. They were inducted on July 30, 2006. With their induction, the Hall of Fame now includes 35 members who played, managed, or owned teams primarily before the modern integration of baseball. "Seventeen from Negro Leagues, pre-Negro leagues Eras Elected to the Hall of Fame by Special Committee,"

<http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/news/2006/060227.htm>, viewed June 13, 2006; George Vecsey, "Sports of the Time: Taking a Seat with the Guys Again" *New York Times*, 28 February 2006, D1.

³⁸ Janet Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985); Lanctot, *Fair Dealing and Clean Playing: The Hilldale Club and the Development of Black Professional Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994); Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

enterprise. Thus, these works focus on the owners and agents who held much of the power in black baseball.³⁹ Although these newer works do place black baseball into the context of the larger history of African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, they are centered on the experiences and accomplishments of the Negro League power brokers. As a result, they devote most of their analysis to the formation and dissolution of Negro League teams and the personal relationships among club owners. This focus on owners and league politics ignores or only gives fleeting attention to a number of important features of black baseball. In particular, these authors neglect to examine the cultural products of black baseball and to explore the racial contestation and resistance that were integral to the sport.

Scholars of early twentieth-century African American history have also largely neglected black baseball.⁴⁰ These scholars have provided an invaluable examination of

³⁹Leslie A. Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues, 1869-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003); Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*; Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901*; Ribowsky, *A Complete History*.

⁴⁰ In particular, I refer to the literature on the Great Migration, the 1920s, and the Great Depression. See for example, Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Black Cleveland: A Ghetto Takes Shape, 1870-1930*; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1930* (Chicago: 1963); Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

the ways in which African Americans worked, lived, organized, and played during Jim Crow. Moreover, because most of these authors have constructed local studies, their concentrated focus on particular urban centers has resulted in multi-faceted portraits of specific black communities. Yet, although historians studying the interwar period have highlighted the important roles of social and cultural life (including leisure) in the formation of African American communities, they have rarely considered the implications of black baseball, specifically, for black community formation, political strategies, racial identification, or public morality. Instead, these authors have been content to merely note, often without comment, the existence of a baseball park or Negro League franchise within specific black communities.

By considering black baseball in the examination of black communities under Jim Crow, historians can begin to answer a number of important questions. For instance, although we know a good deal about the significance of black church ownership during this time period, by studying black baseball we can examine the implications of black ownership of secular, leisure spaces in African American communities. Furthermore, black baseball spawned an important, accompanying oral and visual culture. By critically

John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1970). The majority of the above works deal with northern communities during Jim Crow. For a critical examination of southern communities, see Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

evaluating these cultural productions, one can better understand African American conceptions of racial identity and classification during Jim Crow.

In this dissertation, I attempt to build upon the work undertaken by scholars of African American history and culture. Scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley have produced important recent works of African American cultural studies. These monographs have served as a model for this dissertation and have contributed to the analytical framework through which I have analyzed the visual and oral culture of black baseball. They are particularly useful for their attempt to interrogate cultural expressions in order to determine both everyday resistance and larger racial and political meanings.⁴¹

Based on an understanding of the institutional functions of the Negro Leagues and the trials and triumphs of black baseball players, I examine the implication of black baseball for African Americans living under Jim Crow. In particular, I try to illuminate the ways in which black baseball, as space, as a model for manhood, as a visual image, and as the setting for trickster tales, provided an avenue through which African Americans were able to define and reshape their identity on their own terms. Baseball's accessibility and centrality in black life in the early twentieth century made it a uniquely

⁴¹ Key works include: Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Gena Dagel Caponi, ed., *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); David Krasner, "Parody and Double Consciousness in the Language of Early Black Musical Theatre" *African American Review* 29 (Summer 1995): 317-323; Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Graham White and Shane White, *Stylin': Black Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

important venue for discussion of race and gender norms, as well a crucial site on which to challenge segregation and claims of racial inferiority. Consequently, the dissertation is structured into four interconnecting and overlapping thematic chapters briefly described below.

Chapter One provides a discussion of black baseball's significance in the contest over public spaces during Jim Crow. Specifically, I examine the ways in which African Americans negotiated physical baseball spaces in order to facilitate black baseball as an enterprise and to spur the eventual integration of the white major leagues. In Chapter Two, I turn to the public debates over manhood and morality that marked black baseball during the interwar period. As such, I argue that African American baseball players turned away from the gentlemanly model of black manhood that was favored by earlier African American reformers as well as some contemporary writers and team owners, in order to embrace the ideals of the New Negro. As New Negro men, black baseball players battled to maintain their individuality and their masculinity while overzealous owners and writers constructed respectable public images in order to market the sport to the black and white elite. As with the contested physical spaces of Chapter One, contested notions of manhood illuminate arguments over black enterprise and integration.

In Chapter Three, I examine the important role of visual images for black baseball. Through the utilization of visual images, particularly in the press, African Americans challenged prevalent racist stereotypes. In doing so, they established a counter-narrative that undermined the validity of Jim Crow, the legitimacy of white supremacy, and the scientific nature of white supremacy. These arresting visual images conveyed powerful objections to the racial status quo and communicated radical critiques

of the American racial system. Similarly, Chapter Four explores black vernacular expressive culture in the form of trickster tales and nicknames. Much like the visual images of Chapter Three, the tales and nicknames of black baseball provided an important space through which African Americans could (more) safely challenge the inequities of American racism.

In each of the four chapters, I interrogate the ways in which African Americans struggled to negotiate the meanings of segregated baseball during the first half of the twentieth century. Ballparks, manhood ideals, visual images, trickster tales, and nicknames all functioned as critical spaces in this negotiation. African Americans used baseball in constructing an alternative racial narrative that questioned segregation, supported black enterprise, and posited racial equality.⁴²

Each chapter fits within the timeframe of 1900-1947. Prior to 1900, black baseball, though a presence in American life, lacked the attention and fan base it would gain after the turn of the century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, black baseball would begin to attract the notice of both African American and white audiences. In particular, a young, talented pitcher named Rube Foster would “inspire the national imagination and pump up a national agenda.”⁴³ Foster’s accomplishments and star power coincided with a large expansion of semi-professional black baseball in the

⁴² Specific trickster tales and visual images posited black racial superiority, an even more dangerous proposition during Jim Crow.

⁴³ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 57.

population centers of the east coast, especially in the Philadelphia area.⁴⁴ This expansion would immediately precede and inspire the formation of Foster's Negro National League in 1920. Thus, the vast majority of the time period coincides with the Negro League era and so-called Golden Age (1920-1947).

I have chosen to conclude this dissertation with Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball. Black baseball did not immediately end with the cessation of the color line, but the entrance of African American baseball players into the majors drew attention and fans away from the Negro Leagues and began a long period of disenchantment among black baseball fans. Although African Americans had great pride in the black baseball leagues, most black fans and sportswriters wholeheartedly supported the integration of the majors. For the majority of African Americans, integration was the only acceptable end result for black baseball. Consequently, black fans quickly turned their attention to black major leaguers, determined to support Robinson and his fellow color-line breakers as they forged ahead in a previously all-white world. Moreover, because this work focuses on the importance of black baseball under Jim Crow conditions in the United States, the slow dismantling of the color line in professional baseball provides a good end point. As of 1947, the Negro Leagues did not represent the only possible professional baseball environment for African American players. The story of the decline of black baseball in African American life is important, but outside the scope of this project.

⁴⁴ Ribowsky notes that "[i]n the space of two years, at least nine new teams, all bearing the name 'Giants,' were born within a hundred miles of the city—as were two *genuine* Cuban teams based there, the Cuban Stars and the Havana stars." *A Complete History*, 57.

In order to uncover the role of baseball in the lives of African Americans, this dissertation relies heavily on contemporary black periodicals. Although these periodicals were produced by members of the black elite and therefore represent a particular viewpoint, they also provide the most extensive treatment of black baseball in the time period.

Through the use of black newspapers, I examined the public discourse and visual imagery surrounding black baseball during the time period. These sources reflected the agenda of the sportswriters and black press as well as the expectations of the readership. In particular, I have utilized the major black periodicals of the time, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Crisis*, and *Opportunity*. Many scholars have also relied upon these sources in writing about the Negro Leagues for good reason. They retain their value due to their large readership, a readership that crossed geographic boundaries, and their extensive coverage of black sport. Based on their wide circulation, one can make inferences about the impact of black baseball that would be impossible for smaller publications.⁴⁵

In order to gain a better understanding of the meaning of black baseball for African Americans, I have chosen to examine portions of these periodicals that have largely been ignored by scholars of black baseball. The illustrations, photographs, and editorial art of the black press comprise a significant portion of the primary evidence for

⁴⁵ The newspapers of smaller locales would provide an important look at the various regional and local differences of black baseball coverage. At the same time, cities and towns that lacked an established professional black team would only cover black baseball during stops by barnstorming clubs. Because of this dissertation's more broad scope, I have primarily focused on the larger papers in order to identify and analyze the most commonly disseminated images and information.

this dissertation. These incredibly important and frequently provocative images reflected and challenged contemporary conceptions of race and gender. Through a close reading of these images, I have attempted to recover the meanings and messages of these images and highlight their significance for African Americans during Jim Crow.

Similarly, I analyzed the oral histories and memoirs of black baseball players. These accounts provided a great deal of source material. The players recounted their recollections of life in the Negro Leagues, discussing fan response and attendance, difficulties in traveling under Jim Crow, and the numerous trickster tales that highlighted the exploits of black ball players. Former player accounts, while valuable and often voluminous, have their problems. Memories are frequently faulty and unreliable, particularly as the years pass between these men's careers and their memoirs. Dates and names may be conflated, achievements exaggerated, and disappointments de-emphasized. Moreover, as products of a particular historical time and place (Jim Crow America), these men often minimize the difficulties that they faced as black ball players, perhaps as a means of self-protection. Having survived an era of lynchings and violence against black men, these players learned to be reticent when speaking publicly about racial injustice and may have maintained that policy years later when speaking to interviewers and ghostwriters.

Yet, one should not discount these sources entirely on the basis of these potential inaccuracies. The stories these men have told reveal a great deal about black baseball and its role in African American life and provide some of the only first-hand accounts of black baseball outside of press coverage. As such, these memoirs reveal more direct information about the importance of baseball for working-class African Americans and

recent black migrants as most black ballplayers were from Southern working-class backgrounds. By emphasizing the commonalities among the accounts, one can find meaningful pieces of evidence regarding black baseball.

In this work, I have also focused on trickster tales about black baseball. The analysis and interpretations of these tales was informed by theories of resistance and signifying proposed by James Scott and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.⁴⁶ Using Scott's theory of the hidden transcript, which posits that public statements have two levels of meanings, particularly when performed by members of an oppressed group. In the public transcript, oppressed people express sentiments that can be clearly understood by the dominant societal group, yet in the hidden transcript there is a secondary meaning, only visible to other members of a the subordinate group. By playing between the public and hidden transcript, subordinate people can communicate potentially subversive messages without attracting the ire of their oppressors. Within the realm of the hidden transcript, signifying becomes a crucial discursive practice. Gates has explained that signifying practice allows for a discourse that operates and hinges double meanings. By discursively signifying, as black ball players did with nicknames and trickster tales, one can apply layers of reference to a single word or story thus bestowing layered meanings to one's audiences.

During the era of segregated baseball, African Americans struggled to balance their desire for integration and their patronage of a race enterprise. Many African

⁴⁶James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Americans expressed ideological support for the integration of the white major leagues. Yet at the same time, they valued baseball's role in the black economy. It is within this paradox, that one can uncover the delicate negotiation of segregation, as black baseball advocates undermined the foundations of Jim Crow and advanced the cause of a race institution.

CHAPTER ONE

The Church of Baseball: Sport and the Contest over Space

July 5, 1930. On a warm and breezy Saturday afternoon in New York City, 20,000 baseball fans packed Yankee Stadium.¹ The patrons in attendance witnessed two closely-fought games between the Baltimore Black Sox and the local Lincoln Giants, the culmination of a four game series played over two days in New York.² Staged as a

¹ The attendance numbers varied depending on the source. The *Pittsburgh Courier* expected and observed an attendance of 35,000. This number, however seems to include an additional double-header held at Dexter Park (capacity 15,000). As most of the other black papers of the time placed the attendance at 20,000, the discrepancy seems to be between reporters counting all games for the weekend, and those only counting the Yankee Stadium numbers (20,000). See Chester Washington, "Thrills, Frills and Spills Galore Feature Yankee Stadium Classic" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 July 1930; "Holiday Weekend Games: At Yankee Stadium 20,000 See Brotherhood Benefit Games" *New York Age*, 12 July 1930. The *New York Times* reported an attendance of just 15,000. "Lincoln Giants Split with Baltimore Team" *New York Times*, July 6, 1930.

² Both teams were contenders in the Eastern Negro League race. The Baltimore Black Sox captured the Eastern title in 1929 and the Giants would lose the 1930 championship to the Homestead Grays in a playoff. "Rivals in Yankee Stadium Baseball Classic" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 July 1930, p. 4, second section; John Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 2nd edition (New York: Da Capo

benefit for the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters, the game attracted a well-dressed and diverse crowd.³ According to *Pittsburgh Courier* sportswriter Chester Washington, the crowd was notable for the “thousands of attractive women in softly-tinted flimsy summer garments and nattily-clad men topped off by vari-colored berets.”⁴ Although the majority of fans were African Americans (Washington noted that the fans represented a “mighty mess of Harlem’s sport lovers”), a small but significant number of white Lincoln Giants’ fans were also

Press, 1975, 1992), 18. For black press coverage of this series, see “35,000 to see Black Sox- Lincoln Giants” *New York Age*, 5 July 1930; “Bojangles Wins, But Phil Edwards Is Beaten in Half-Mile Handicap at Yankee Stadium Porters’ Benefit” *New York Age*, 12 July 1930; “Holiday Weekend Games: At Yankee Stadium 20,000 See Brotherhood Benefit Games” *New York Age*, 12 July 1930, “Black Sox, Stars of Cuba, Fall Before Lincoln Giants” *Chicago Defender*, 12 July 1930; “Phil Edwards is Defeated in 880 at Yank Stadium” *Chicago Defender*, 12 July 1930; Bill Gibson, “Hear me Talkin’ To Ya” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 July 1930; Gibson, “Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya” *Baltimore Afro American*, 12 July 1930; Chester Washington, “Thrills, Frills and Spills Galore Feature Yankee Stadium Classic” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 July 1930. The *New York Times* also published an account of the game. “Lincoln Giants Split with Baltimore Team” *New York Times*, 6 July 1930.

³ Organized by civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was a Chicago-based union designed to secure not only better economic conditions for its members (African American porters and other railroad employees) but also greater civil and citizenship rights. On Randolph and the Brotherhood, see Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁴ Chester Washington, “Thrills, Frills and Spills Galore Feature Yankee Stadium Classic” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 July 1930.

Figure 1.1: Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, *New York Age*, 5 July 1930



in attendance.⁵ Also in attendance was the owner of the New York Yankees and Yankee Stadium, Jacob Rupert, as well as a number of local city and baseball officials. The presence of a celebrity, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson may have inspired a great deal of excitement among many in the crowd. Robinson delighted the fans “by winning a 100-yard handicap race running backwards pitted against a flock of youngsters.”⁶ (See Figure 1.1)

For many in the crowd, attending the game was both a monetary hardship and a necessary reprieve from the economic demands of the Great Depression.⁷ In the midst of the first summer of the Depression, record numbers of Americans, were suddenly

⁵ A promotional article in the *Courier* noted that a number of white baseball fans regularly attended Sunday games featuring the Lincoln Giants and were expected to attend the July 5 doubleheader. “Rivals in Yankee Stadium Baseball Classic.”

⁶ Washington, “Thrills, Frills and Spills.” Robinson owned his own black baseball team, Bill Robinson’s Harlem Stars in 1931. “Changes Name of NY Stars” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 23 May 1931. Robinson was widely known to be a baseball fan and became an unofficial “mascot” for the New York Yankees. “Nuts About Baseball” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 2, 1930, 24, 56.

⁷ Lofton Mitchell recalled the degree to which Joe Louis brought joy to the residents of Harlem during the Great Depression. Not only were Harlem residents facing dire financial straits, but other national and international developments had also dismayed African Americans. “Our biggest celebrations were on nights when Joe Louis fought. The Brown Bomber, appearing in darkness when Italy invaded Ethiopia and the Scottsboro Boys faced lynching, became a black hero the history books could not ignore.” Mitchell, “This is Me! I’m Somebody” (*Freedomways*, 1963), reprinted in Milton Meltzer, ed., *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro 1916-1966* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 80. On movies as another form of escapism during the Great Depression see Gerald D. Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II: Organizing America, 1933-1945* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 85-87.

unemployed and struggling to make ends meet.⁸ The large influx of southern black migrants and West Indian immigrants that had swelled Harlem's population found that

⁸ The Depression exacerbated the already strained financial circumstances faced by African Americans in Harlem. "Hand-to-mouth living had been the rule in Harlem for many years. Though some had tasted fatted calf during lush days, more than two thousand Negro families were destitute at the height of prosperity...with the financial collapse in October 1929, a large mass of Negroes were faced with the reality of starvation and they turned sadly to the public relief." Consequently, overcrowding became an overwhelming problem in Harlem. Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, "The Depression in Harlem" reprinted in Bernard Sternsher, ed., *Hitting Home: The Great Depression in Town and Country* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 105-106. For brief first hand accounts of African Americans struggling during the Depression, see Milton Metzler, ed., *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro, 1916-1966* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 89-94, 97-100, 116-118, 121-129, 132-136. On African Americans and the Great Depression, see St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 77-98, 287-341; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); Stephanie J. Shaw, "Using the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives to Study the Impact of the Great Depression" *Journal of Southern History* 69 (August 2003): 623-658; Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1970). On the white major leagues during the Depression, see Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Robert Gregory, *Diz: The Story of Dizzy Dean and Baseball During the Great Depression* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). For a discussion of the Negro Leagues during the Great Depression, see Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Mark Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues, 1884-1955* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995).

the economic opportunities that had inspired their move to New York were rapidly diminishing.⁹ Despite the darkening economic times, black and white New Yorkers packed Yankee Stadium to cheer on the Lincoln Giants and to be part of the vibrant mass celebrating Independence Day.¹⁰ Dressed in their finest clothes, the patrons sought

⁹ James Weldon Johnson, "The Making of Harlem," *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 636-637; Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City" *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 641; W.A. Domingo, "The Tropics in New York" *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 648-650.

¹⁰ Although black baseball, like other businesses, struggled at times during the Depression, it managed to survive. Part of its survival was due to an influx of money from numbers runners like Gus Greenlee (who will be discussed in great length later in this chapter). The numbers game gained even greater popularity during the Great Depression as "people...hoped to gain through luck what had been denied then through labor." Ottley and Weatherby, "The Depression in Harlem," 113. The other factor in black baseball's survival was the establishment of alternative business strategies. Particularly for smaller-scale games, team owners would neglect to charge a standard admission price and instead passed the hat (which was a great risk, at times they received very little). In 1931, *Pittsburgh Courier* reporter C.E. Pendleton complained that Pittsburgh Crawfords' fans were not "square with the team." Pendleton claimed that attendees at the games were spending money on refreshments rather than contributing to the hat. As an example, he noted disapprovingly that "[i]t was reported that 6000 attended the evening game Decoration Day and that the contributions totaled less than \$80." Pendleton, "Public's Non-Support Makes Crawford's Future Dubious" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 June 1931. Harold Tinker reported a similar accounting in an oral interview. When he was with the Crawfords, "we played a game before about 3,000 people ...and we took up, I think it was \$13." Tinker, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 14. Another strategy was to suspend players' standard salaries and instead pay them a percentage of the gate receipts. Unsurprisingly, this latter policy was unpopular with most players. Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 8; Crush Holloway, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 68; Webster McDonald, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 82, 84-85; Bill Foster, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 194-195; Buck Leonard, interview by Holway,

entertainment. Even those who were uninterested in the outcome of the game enjoyed the social aspects of the event. This particular game featured Robinson's comedic race, a large band, and a number of exhibition races. In addition to the scheduled entertainment, one fan "drew the spotlight away from the game upon his entrance." The man in question was "attempting to set a new fad" by wearing "a flawless tuxedo coat and the correct aviation collar and bat wing times, supported by a cane and a pair of white flannel trousers and sport shoes."¹¹ Negro League games provided an opportunity to see and to be seen: to catch up with acquaintances and meet new associates, to flirt and date, to listen to bands and laugh at comedic routines, to gamble and hopefully to win much needed cash.¹²

Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues, 255, 264-265. During more flush financial times, Negro League teams would stage special games, during which players were off salary, but would take home a portion of the gate. Players looked upon this arrangement more favorably as the games constituted a bonus of sorts. Bill Drake, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 32. Other players negotiated a set salary plus a portion of gate receipts. Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 179.

¹¹ Washington, "Thrills, Frills and Spills," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 July 1930.

¹² Robin D.G. Kelley as well as Graham White and Shane White have noted the significance of "dressing up" for African Americans, especially working-class African Americans. For many who were forced to wear uniforms during their daily work, it was a rare opportunity to publicly express themselves through clothing of their own choosing. Moreover, by "dressing up," working-class African Americans could present themselves in a manner consistent with a higher-class position, thereby "collapsing status distinctions between themselves and their oppressors." Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South' *Journal of American History* 80 (June 1993), 86. See also Graham White and Shane White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Accounts of this doubleheader provide not only important information about the ways in which Americans in the Depression sought out leisure activities for momentary pleasure and escape, but also a great deal about black baseball and African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. After an initial doubleheader at Dexter Park, the Giants' traditional home grounds, the action moved to Yankee Stadium.¹³ Yankee Stadium was a much larger venue and had the added benefit of being a major league facility. As such, the Giants and Black Sox would have had access to finely-maintained grounds and more comfortable clubhouse amenities.

For the African American fans in attendance, having Yankee Stadium as the venue would have added both difficulties and advantages. Cash-strapped fans would have traveled from Harlem to the Bronx, incurring transportation expenses. Moreover, the "concrete-bowl" construction of Yankee Stadium undoubtedly trapped a great deal more heat and provided significantly less shade than a smaller venue, an important consideration in mid-summer.¹⁴ Yet despite these inconveniences, witnessing a game in Yankee Stadium had a particular value for African American fans. During a period of segregation and professional color lines, Yankee Stadium represented the pinnacle of major league success. "The House That Ruth Built" was the most important physical venue in the American baseball world in 1930.¹⁵ Advertisements for the series

¹³ "Rivals in Yankee Stadium Baseball Classic" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 July 1930, p. 4, second section

¹⁴ Washington, "Thrills, Frills, and Spills Galore."

¹⁵ On Babe Ruth's significance, see Robert C. Cottrell, *Blackball, the Black Sox, and the Babe: Baseball's Crucial 1920 Season*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002; Robert W. Creamer, *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York: Fireside Books, 1974, 1992); Jim Reisler, *Babe Ruth: Launching the*

capitalized on Yankee Stadium's significance, calling the series "the biggest event of the year" and encouraging "Harlem" to "fill the Yankee Stadium." (Figure 1.2) If that was not enticing enough for patrons, the ad continued by noting that these games would represent the "first time in history" that "the famous Yankee Stadium" was "donated to the colored people of Harlem."

For African American fans, players, and sportswriters, this doubleheader in Yankee Stadium provided a glimpse of what could be if black baseball stars could regularly compete in comparable facilities. Without contradiction, black baseball advocates dared to hope for two possible solutions: that the Negro Leagues would obtain the capital necessary to build their own "green cathedrals," subsequently flourishing as a successful black enterprise, and that the white major leagues would finally open the door to the many deserving blackball stars.¹⁶

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which players, fans, owners, and writers conceptualized and negotiated space for black baseball under Jim Crow. In order to establish the centrality of baseball within black life, I will first trace the popularity and significance of baseball in black communities. Then, I will interrogate the role of black baseball in two aspects of the larger debate over segregated leisure: property access/ownership and transportation/travel. As contemporary concerns over segregated space and travel reflected national political debates over civil rights and racial equality,

Legend (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004); Ken Sobol, *Babe Ruth and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1974).

¹⁶ On the significance of baseball parks, see Phillip J. Lowry, *Green Cathedrals: The Ultimate Celebrations of All 273 Major League and Negro League Ballparks Past and Present* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); Rich Westcott, *Philadelphia's Old Ball Parks* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

Figure 1.2: Advertisement, *New York Age*, 5 July

"Let's Fill the Yankee Stadium!"

THE PULLMAN PORTERS AGAIN

2 BIG BALL GAMES!

NEW YORK

Lincoln Giants

VS.

BALTIMORE

Black Sox

SATURDAY, JULY 5th

FIRST GAME AT 1:30 P. M.

Positively, The Biggest Event of The Year . . .
For The First Time in History The Famous

YANKEE STADIUM

Is Donated to the Colored People of Harlem for the Benefit
of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters by Courtesy of

COLONEL JACOB RUPPERT.
Owner The New York Yankees

BETWEEN THE GAMES
100-Yard, Special Invitation Half-Mile, Special Invitation
No-city Race

Continuous Music by 369th Infantry Band

GENERAL ADMISSION

GRAND STAND	ONE DOLLAR
RESERVED AND BOX SEATS	\$1.50

TICKETS ON SALE at the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car
Porters Headquarters, 230 West 135th Street; Johnson's Restaurant,
2380 Seventh Avenue; Amsterdam News, 2297 Seventh
Avenue; The New York Age, 230 West 135th Street; Al
Bryant's Billiard Parlor, Seventh Avenue, near 140th Street.

this chapter will also explore the ways in which shifting attitudes toward black enterprise and segregation complicated black baseball.

In the first half of the twentieth century, vast demographic shifts marked African American life. In search of greater opportunities, large numbers of African Americans moved first to urban centers in the South.¹⁷ Temporarily settling in cities such as Houston, Nashville, and Birmingham, previously rural African Americans sought to make a living in industrial mills and factories or at least to make enough money to finance a permanent move north.¹⁸ Shut out of unions, denied the opportunity for anything other than entry-level manual labor, and confronted with government-sanctioned segregation, a number of these migrants continued north when they were able.¹⁹ Hoping for a less-restrictive society and better job prospects, African Americans left the urban South for the industrial centers of the North and Midwest.²⁰

¹⁷ Bernadette Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race: The Great Migrations to Houston, Texas, 1914-1941" *Journal of Urban History* 31 (2005): 437-438.

¹⁸ Many migrants followed a "chain migration" north. Ronald L. Lewis, "From Peasant to Proletarian: The Migration of Southern Blacks to the Central Appalachian Coalfields" *Journal of Southern History* 55 (February 1989): 77-102. For a detailed case study of black migration to a southern city, see Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race," 435-478. Earl Lewis has provided a detailed examination of black life in Norfolk, Virginia, including the impact of the Great Migration. See Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Eric Arnesen provides a detailed account of how white railroad unions fought not only to exclude African American railroad workers from their unions but also to prevent them from assuming advanced positions within railway companies. Arnesen, "'Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down': The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880-1920" *American Historical Review* (December 1994): 1601-1633. African American workers would encounter similar union exclusions and "job ceilings"

Inspired by newspaper ads and word-of-mouth, these migrants, most of whom were young males, boarded trains for cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Chicago.²¹

in the North, see Epstein, *The Negro Migrant*, 32-34, 38-44; Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," 642-643.

²⁰ The scholarship on the Great Migration is voluminous. For a sampling of the secondary works, see Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Black Cleveland: A Ghetto Takes Shape, 1870-1930*; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1930* (Chicago: 1963); Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). For a statistical examination of black migration within the larger context of general internal migration in the United States, see Patricia Kelly Hall and Steven Ruggles, "'Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity': New Evidence on the Internal Migration of Americans, 1850-2000" *Journal of American History* 90 (December 2004): 829-846.

²¹ A 1918 study of African American migrants to Pittsburgh concluded that approximately 30 percent of migrants were accompanied by their family. Thus, 70 percent were single men or women, with the vast majority of that group consisting of young men. According to the study, 75 percent of all Southern migrants were "between the ages of eighteen and forty." Abraham Epstein, *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*, reprint edition (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1918, 1969), 7, 10, 18. Within this context, then, it is unsurprising that a significant number of Negro League players (young, black males) were either recent migrants or relocated from the south to the north to establish themselves as professional baseball players. To demonstrate the extent of this phenomenon, of the seventeen former blackball players interviewed by John Holway in the 1970s, thirteen were born in the South. Of those

Upon their arrival, these new citizens entered the local black enclaves, searching for lodging, employment, and, when possible, extended family members or other potential contacts.

As the Great Migration and the economic lures of World War I domestic employment brought a significant number of African Americans to northern urban centers, the new migrants negotiated a physical, cultural, and social space within their new communities. Leisure spaces, particularly baseball fields, were problematic sites of conflict as native-born whites, recently arrived immigrants, and African Americans clashed over access to recreational sites.²² These street-level clashes highlighted the ways

thirteen, four migrated either with their families or alone as young men to northern cities in search of employment (other than baseball). Two of the remaining thirteen lived in a large urban southern city, Atlanta. See Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 41-45, 62-64, 112-113, 145, 173, 181, 209-212, 221, 239, 252, 284, 302, 330.

²²Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 110; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 203. On leisure and public amusements generally, see David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). On working-class women and leisure, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For working-class (especially immigrant) women, popular culture, and dime novels, see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Roy Rosenzweig has examined industrial immigrant workers and their attempt to carve out leisure time and space for visits to saloons and holiday celebrations in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

in which different ethnic and racial groups claimed public spaces as exclusive sites of play.²³

Within this increasingly tense and segregated environment, ensuring the success of black businesses became a central political issue for a number of African Americans. Community support for local black enterprise had a long history in the United States. African American leaders of all stripes, be they Washingtonian, Du Boisian, or Garveyites, championed black economic success and encouraged followers to patronize “race” merchants.²⁴ Although the support of race enterprises came from widely divergent ideological camps, the message was clear. When possible, African Americans should

²³ Gerald R. Gems has explored issues of leisure and ethnic identities in *Windy City Wars Labor, Leisure, and Sport in the Making of Chicago* (Landham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997). See also, Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Drake and Cayton observed that the Chicago color line was particularly unwavering for “recreational situations that emphasize active participation rather than merely looking on, and in which men and women participate together.” *Black Metropolis*, 106.

²⁴ Fred R. Moore, “Organizing Local Business Leagues” (1904) reprinted in *Black Nationalism in America*, edited by John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 238-241; “Report of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League” (1913), reprinted in Bracey, et al, eds., *Black Nationalism*, 241-243; Editorial, “Value of Negro Business Leagues” reprinted in Bracey, et al, eds. *Black Nationalism*, 243-245; W.E.B. Du Bois “Resolutions of the Atlanta University Conference on the Negro in Business” (1899) reprinted in Bracey, et al, eds., *Black Nationalism*, 262-263; Du Bois, *The Crisis* 19 (December 1919), 48, 50; George W. Blount, “The Virginia State Negro Business League” *The Competitor* (March 1920), 26.

patronize African American businesses. This message became even more critical during the Great Depression.²⁵

During the Depression, many black political and community leaders supported the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work Campaigns” as well as the concept of the “Double Duty Dollar.”²⁶ With jobs scarce and African Americans disproportionately unemployed,

²⁵ Despite this sentiment and Du Bois publicly-declared support of race institutions when appropriate, Walter White, as secretary of the NAACP, continued to uncompromisingly pursue integration and condemn attempts to build black-only institutions. White did support the building of community centers in black neighborhoods as long as the center encouraged interracial cooperation and participation whenever possible. In a series of letters between White and a colleague in Ithaca, NY, White revealed a great deal about his views on integration and segregation especially in terms of leisure spaces. See R.E. Treman to Walter White, Ithaca, NY, April 18, 1938; White to Treman, New York, April 19th, 1938; White to Treman, New York, October 4, 1938, all of the letters are found in the Papers of the NAACP, Part 2, Correspondence of select officials, Walter White, reels 17-18.

²⁶ Harlem elite, “ministers, newspaper editors and writers, politicians, radicals and others” generally opposed an initial Harlem boycott movement as organized by Sufi Abdul Hamid. Hamid had previously led a successful boycott movement in Chicago. In Harlem, however, he found that citizens....were hopelessly divided over the dilemma of Harlem.” In particular, some ministers “supported the idea of giving Negro youth a chance at decent jobs in the community....but....wanted the thing accomplished in a spirit of Christian kindness.” In an attempt to win concessions from white business owners in a less confrontational manner, members of the Harlem elite, “led by Reverend John H. Johnson....and Miss Effa Manley,” established the Harlem Citizen’s League for Fair Play. Effa Manley would come to prominence in the late 1930s as the first lady of the Negro Leagues. Manley’s husband owned the Newark (Brooklyn) Eagles. Effa Manley served as the business manager and ran the team in terms of daily decisions. The Citizen’s League failed to persuade a prominent local businessman to employ African Americans in greater number and “better positions.” The League then adopted Hamid’s boycott method to great success. Tensions remained high between Hamid and the League, much to benefit of white merchants. In an attempt

black reformers encouraged people to spend their money in ways that would benefit the race and their local communities. Within this environment, the Negro Leagues sought to define itself as a business both for and by African Americans.

The consistent and ever-increasing support for “race enterprise” within African American communities did not necessarily reflect the acceptance of segregation. Herbert Aptheker observed that W.E.B. “Du Bois consistently fought against forced segregation and discrimination. At the same time, and without any contradiction in his own mind, he insisted that where separate Black institutions or organizations existed, it was necessary

to prevent Hamid from overseeing the newly employed black workers, the League withdrew much of its support and entered into a détente with white merchants and “denounced the activities of irresponsible troublemakers in Harlem.” Claude McKay, excerpt from *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, reprinted in Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, eds., *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 109-118, quotes 115, 116, 118. On the Harlem boycott and other contemporary boycotts in Richmond and Washington D.C., see Du Bois, “Segregation in the North” *The Crisis* 41 (April 1934): 115-117. Hamid allegedly held extreme anti-Semitic feelings that most likely contributed to his disavowal by the Citizen’s League. On Hamid as the “Black Hitler,” see “Harlem’s Hitler Brought to Court” *New York Times*, 9 October 1934; “‘Black Hitler’ Defended On” *New York Times*, 11 October 1934; “Free in Anti-Semitic Case” *New York Times*, 12 October 1934; “Harlem’s ‘Hitler’ Jailed to Await Trial,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1935. In the 1935 case, members of the Citizen’s League testified against Hamid. It is unclear whether Hamid’s views were exaggerated in order to make him a target or if they represented his true beliefs. Hamid was distributing a pamphlet advising African Americans to reject white supremacy prior to the January 1935 arrest. And his second trial seemed to focus on the possibility that his boycott campaigns could incite race riots. “Harlem’s ‘Hitler’ Jailed for Remarks” *New York Times*, 20 January 1935; “Injunction Halts ‘Black Hitlerites’” *New York Times*, 6 July 1935; “Plane Crash Fatal to Harlem Hitler” *New York Times*, 1 August 1938. On the “Double Duty Dollar,” see Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 430-432.

and proper to bring those to as high a point of efficiency and service as possible.”²⁷

Similarly, African American fans, players, and writers promoted the Negro Leagues as a black enterprise at the same time that they lobbied for the eventual integration of the white major leagues. Under this reasoning, black baseball advocates argued that integration could only be achieved if the Negro Leagues functioned as a healthy and thriving example of black enterprise.

These two interrelated desires came to a head during the Great Depression. The economic motivations for supporting black baseball combined with what black sportswriters saw as a small opening through which they could sway white baseball officials. Throughout the 1930s, the black press publicized the comparative success of Negro League teams in attracting fans and suggested that white baseball would solve its attendance woes by abandoning the color line.²⁸

Thus, black baseball’s success as black enterprise ultimately led to its demise. Particularly with the advent of World War II and the racial inequities black wartime service exposed, African Americans became more willing to combat segregation. As such, they sought full inclusion into professional baseball and public education.²⁹

²⁷ Herbert Aptheker, ed., *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Volume I Selections, 1877-1934* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 272.

²⁸ “Coast Newspapers Work To Get Race in Majors” *Chicago Defender*, 10 August 1935; “Major Leagues Jim Crowed” *Chicago Defender*, 30 May 1936; “Sox and Cubs” *Chicago Defender*, 16 January 1936; “Daily Scribe Speaks of Jim Crow in the Majors” *Chicago Defender*, 13 July 1935; “30,000 Jam Shows We’re Game’s Asset” *Chicago Defender*, 29 August 1936.

²⁹ For example, E.B. Henderson argued against segregated recreation in 1940. According to Henderson, “segregation connotes discrimination and becomes more costly as attempts to equalize opportunity

Supporters of black baseball successfully lobbied for major league baseball to lift its color line. Energized by their victory, African American baseball fans threw the weight of their support and their attendance to Jackie Robinson and the former Negro Leaguers who entered the majors. As Robinson left the world of professional black baseball for the formerly white major leagues, so did many black fans.³⁰

Baseball has had a long history in African American cultural life. Nineteenth-century community festivals often included a baseball game and the first all-black professional baseball team formed in the 1860s.³¹ From the 1880s on, African Americans staged annual Emancipation Days--celebrations that intertwined politics, religion, and sports. Emancipation Day organizers frequently scheduled political speeches and intercommunity baseball games back-to-back, ensuring that both activities were well-attended.³² In cities and towns alike, African American commencement ceremonies

increase." See Henderson, "The Participation of Negro Youth in Community and Educational Programs" *The Journal of Negro Education* 9 (July 1940): 417-418, 424.

³⁰ The demise of the Negro Leagues will be discussed in further detail in the Epilogue. For scholarly examinations of the end of the Negro Leagues, see Patricia Vignola, "'The Enemies at the Gate: An Economic Debate about the Denouement of Negro League Baseball.'" *Nine* 13 (February 2005): 71-81.

³¹ On the first black baseball team, see Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 16-17.

³² "Special to Courier" *Pittsburgh Courier* 5, August 1911; "Thousands Celebrate Big Emancipation Day" *Cleveland Advocate*, 11 August 1917, 1; Richard White, "Civil Rights Agitation: Emancipation Days in Central New York in the 1880s" *The Journal of Negro History* 78 (Winter 1993): 16, 21; William H. Wiggins, Jr., *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 40-43, 96, 101. Booker T. Washington provided a detailed account of an Arizona

frequently included a baseball game as did Juneteenth and Fourth of July commemorations.³³

As Negro League baseball established itself as an important institution within black culture and society in the twentieth century, African Americans spent their limited leisure time at the ballpark. On Sundays, in particular, African Americans would crowd local ballparks, eager to participate in what was one of the more important weekly social events.³⁴ Negro Leaguer Leon Day fondly recalled such days. "Sunday in Newark in the 1930s and '40s was church, a doubleheader, and then either out to dinner or to a friend's home for dinner."³⁵

Moreover, African Americans continued to celebrate holidays with a trip to the ballpark. The Fourth of July was particularly profitable for the Negro Leagues; clubs frequently staged daily doubleheaders during Independence Day weekends to take

Emancipation Day celebration in a 1911 article. Washington, "The Race Problem in Arizona" *The Independent* 71, October 26, 1911: 909-914.

³³ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1964, 1994) 19; Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way*, 21-22.

³⁴ Sunday games were the most profitable and well-attended. In 1920, *The Competitor* noted that teams thrived in cities that permitted "Sunday baseball, a feature which almost insures success." Ira F. Lewis, "National Baseball League Formed" *The Competitor* (March 1920), 67. An executive with the Elite Giants recalled that for Negro League teams, "[t]he big day was Sunday at home. That's when we made our payroll." Dick Powell, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 86.

³⁵ Bruce Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White: The Illustrated History of the Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 106.

advantage of the holiday crowds.³⁶ Decoration Day (Memorial Day) baseball contests attracted fans by the thousands, eager to see their favorite teams compete.³⁷ Likewise, Emancipation Day organizers continued to include baseball as an important part of the day's events.³⁸

Baseball was not merely a holiday amusement, the sport also had a symbolic value for African Americans. In the first half of the twentieth century, baseball was the unquestioned national pastime.³⁹ C.I. Taylor, owner and manager of the Indianapolis A.B.C.'s, described baseball as a pervasive force in American society. "Baseball is their

³⁶ "Rivals in Yankee Stadium Baseball Classic," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 July 1930; *Baltimore Afro-American*, 16 July 1938;

³⁷ "Personals" *Chicago Defender*, 28 May 1910; "K.C. Monarchs Leave to Start Drills in South" *Chicago Defender*, 21 April 1934. In some cases, the demand was so strong that clubs would schedule tripleheaders for the holiday. These tripleheaders usually followed a doubleheader on the day immediately preceding the holiday. In 1932, the Crawfords and the Grays played five games in two days over the Sunday and Monday of Decoration Day weekend. "Grays-Crawfords Meet Decoration Day," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 May 1932; "Craws win 3, Grays 2; Beverly and Britt Pitch Classics; 10,000 Attend," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 June 1932. Easter Monday and Flag Day also were profitable holidays for black baseball. "Baseball Easter Monday," "Base Ball Easter Monday Classic," "Baseball Classic," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 18 April 1931; "Flag Day at Auburn Park" *Chicago Defender*, 14 May 1910.

³⁸ "Rivals in Yankee Stadium Baseball Classic" *Pittsburgh Courier* 5 July 1930; *Baltimore Afro American* 16 July 1938; Buck O'Neil, Steve Wulf, and David Conrads, *I Was Right on Time: My Journey from the Negro Leagues to the Majors* (New York: Fireside Books, 1997), 53. O'Neil remarks that it was an "Emancipation Day" for players as well. Because of the large crowds that attended those games, the players received a great deal of money and thus had more "freedom."

³⁹ Steven A. Riess, "Professional Baseball and Social Mobility" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (Autumn 1980): 235.

[African Americans'] national game as much as it is the national game of the whites, because it is above all things an AMERICAN game. It abides deep in the sport loving natures of all Americans regardless of their creed or color."⁴⁰ Thus, African Americans could claim a part of a larger national institution by performing and supporting baseball.⁴¹

African Americans embraced baseball as both a spectator sport and an amateur athletic pursuit. Particularly for young African American male migrants, participation in baseball games and leagues provided an outlet through which they could use their bodies for something other than physically-taxing wage labor.⁴² Robin D.G. Kelley has posited

⁴⁰ C.I. Taylor, "The Future of Colored Baseball" *The Competitor*, February 1920, 76, emphasis original.

⁴¹ Ira F. Lewis argued that in Chicago, baseball was "the fourth meal of the day." Lewis, "National Baseball League Formed," March 1920, 66. Football, on the other hand, functioned as a popular collegiate sport prior to World War II. Football matches among historically black colleges and universities were popular, particularly with the African American elite, and well-covered in the black sporting press. Moreover, some white colleges in the north included African Americans on their football nines. Ira F. Lewis, "Who'll be the Next?" *The Competitor*, October-November, 1920, 221-225, "The Good Old Days" *The Competitor*, October-November, 1920, 225, 227; Ira F. Lewis, "Our Colleges and Athletics" *The Competitor*, December 1920, 290-292; *Chicago Defender*, 19 October 1921. During this time period, professional football was unstable and unremarkable save for the few African Americans who competed for brief periods in the NFL. The NFL would establish a color line in 1934 and prevent African Americans from entering until 1946. Despite the lifting of the color line, integration in professional football was slow and restrictive. Most teams practiced a policy of excluding black players from all but a few positions and would recruit and drop black players on a regular basis. In this latter practice, team owners would claim to be actively pursuing black talent and point to their recruiting record as evidence. Yet, by subsequently dropping those players from their rosters before the beginning of the season, they did not have to play them. Michael E. Lomax, "The African American Experience in Professional Football" *Journal of Social History* 33 (1999), 163-165.

⁴² African American reformers promoted these leagues and other organized recreation as a favorable

that “dance halls and blues clubs” provided arenas through which working-class African Americans could “take back their bodies....recuperate...be together.”⁴³ Likewise the baseball park, both the stands and the field, functioned as a similar space. Yet, as with all public and semi-public spaces in the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans had to negotiate the local rules of segregation in accessing these physical spaces.

As African Americans fled rural southern farms in search of industrial jobs in southern cities, they found a strict enforcement of segregation in public recreation facilities. Local authorities maintained segregated parks, and rarely funded parks for the African American population.⁴⁴ As such, the only access many African Americans had to such facilities was through their role as caregivers for white children. *The Crisis* and progressive playground activists campaigned for the establishment of “separate and

alternative to other expressions of leisure and physicality. A. H. Wyman, “Recreation in Industrial Communities” *The Competitor*, July 1920, 13-14; Henderson, “The Participation of Negro Youth,” 417-418, 424; See also Patrick B. Miller, “To ‘Bring the Race Along Rapidly’: Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years.” *History of Education Quarterly* 35 (Summer 1995); Jeffrey J. Pilz, “The Beginnings of Organized Play for Black America: E.T. Attwell and The PRAA” *The Journal of Negro History* 70 (1985): 59-72. On less-respectable leisure pursuits, race, and law enforcement in Harlem, see Marcy S. Sack, “‘To Show Who Was In Charge’: Police Repression of New York City’s Black Population at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” *Journal of Urban History* 31 (September 2005): 799-819.

⁴³ Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem,” 84.

⁴⁴ Baltimore recreation officials denied high school athletes from a black city school access to field house facilities during a track and field meet, resulting in the school’s withdrawal from competition. “Douglass Track Team Denied” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 30 May 1931.

equal” black parks, but rarely found success. *The Crisis* took the notion of an all-black park to an extreme, requesting that the city of Memphis establish a park for blacks with only black animals and “plenty of jim crows...flying overhead.”⁴⁵ In Atlanta, city officials designated recreational facilities by race, allocating the vast majority of public leisure spaces for white residents.⁴⁶ Unsatisfied with mere segregation and insufficient facilities for black residents, Atlanta officials prohibited black and white amateur baseball clubs from competing separately within a two-block radius of each other. Atlanta thus barred not only interracial competition, but also prevented black and white teams from competing in relative proximity.⁴⁷ Other southern cities enforced segregation by overcharging African American groups for the rental of local parks and other public recreational facilities.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Concerning Parks” *The Crisis* 1 (March 1911): 28; “Parks Again” *The Crisis* 2 (June 1911): 76-77.

⁴⁶ “Atlanta Opens Swimming Pool for its Colored Citizens” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 16 September 1932.

⁴⁷ Andrew M. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 96-99. It is important to note that even with established segregation in the white major leagues, all-black baseball teams faced all-white baseball teams in games throughout the Jim Crow era. When these games involved white major league players, there were significant limitations placed on those players. Moreover, some cities and organizations did ban such contests. Yet despite these obstacles, black and white teams faced each other on a regular (at times, informal) basis. Interracial baseball competition, and its significance, will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

⁴⁸ “A New Orleans Baseball Park” *The Crisis* 23 (November 1921): 19-20. New Orleans had hosted interracial baseball games until 1890. Dale A. Somers, “Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900” *Journal of Southern History* 40 (February 1974), 39-40.

In the North, African Americans had more opportunities for sports and other recreational activities. As part of the growing recreation movement popularized by Progressive Era social welfare advocates in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, community groups constructed and maintained recreational facilities in various city neighborhoods.⁴⁹ In Chicago, the YMCA established recreational facilities and sponsored a number of baseball leagues and workplace-based baseball teams in black neighborhoods in order to provide for the leisure needs of the growing migrant population in the city.⁵⁰ The *Chicago Defender's* sports page revealed the degree to

⁴⁹ For an extensive look at the playground movement, see Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playground and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Gems, *Windy City Wars*; Cary Goodman, *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life on the Lower East Side* (1979); Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982); Mark A. Kadzielski, "As a Flower Needs Sunshine: The Origins of Organized Children's Recreation in Philadelphia, 1886-1911" *Journal of Sport History* 4 (Summer 1977): 169-188. Robert Pruter has discussed violence and rough behavior among Chicago youth baseball players in the era preceding organized recreation reform. Pruter, "Youth Baseball in Chicago, 1868-1890: Not Always Sandlot Ball" *Journal of Sports History* 26 (Spring 1999): 1-28.

⁵⁰ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 174. African American reformers promoted these leagues and other organized recreation as a favorable alternative to other expressions of leisure and physicality. A. H. Wyman, "Recreation in Industrial Communities" *The Competitor*, July 1920, 13-14; "Editorials" *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 699; Henderson, "The Participation of Negro Youth," 417-418, 424. See also Epstein, *The Negro Migrant*, 70; Patrick B. Miller, "To 'Bring the Race Along Rapidly': Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years." *History of Education Quarterly* 35 (Summer 1995); Jeffrey J. Pilz, "The Beginnings of Organized Play for Black America: E.T. Attwell and The PRAA" *The Journal of Negro History* 70 (1985): 59-72. On less-respectable leisure pursuits, race, and law enforcement in Harlem, see Marcy S. Sack, "'To Show Who Was In Charge':

which these teams were prevalent in the city. The *Defender* often listed as many as fifty games for any given spring or summer weekend.⁵¹ Likewise, other northern cities established recreational facilities in black neighborhoods. These facilities, however, were rarely large enough to fulfill the leisure needs of the adjacent black neighborhoods.⁵²

These new recreational sites, however, often became an arena of racial and ethnic conflict. In the early twentieth-century urban North, ambiguous segregation policies

Police Repression of New York City's Black Population at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" *Journal of Urban History* 31 (September 2005): 799-819. In at least one instance, white YMCA members objected to the establishment of a local black counterpart. In the early 1910s, the Cincinnati YMCA excluded African Americans entirely and then "rose in wrath" when black residents "started a branch...and caused the colored organization to change its name to the YBCA" (The Young Boys' Christian Association). This name change also allowed white residents to diminish the manhood and masculinity of African Americans by linguistically rendering them as "boys." Frank U. Quillan, *The Color Line in Ohio: A History of Race Prejudice in a Typical Northern State* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, 1913), 128.

⁵¹ A perusal of the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* during the 1910s and 1920s reveals the pervasiveness of these leagues and teams. In the 1930s, the black press coverage of local teams diminished as editors filled their sports pages with articles about nationally-known professional and semi-professional teams. For representative examples of local coverage, see "Chicago Base Ball League" *Chicago Defender*, 25 June 1910, p. 4; "YMCA notes" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 August 1911; "Standing of Clubs in Industrial and Community League" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 January 1927. The *Pittsburgh Courier* lauded the local YMCA for its commitment to "higher ideals, better men mentally, physically and morally." "Pay Your Subscriptions" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 1911.

⁵² Pilz, "The Beginnings of Organized Play for Black America," 59-72. While many of these facilities were not explicitly segregated, local custom (and sometimes, local law enforcement) ensured that a color line was maintained. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 206, Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 105-110.

resulted in disagreements over access rights to recreational facilities.⁵³ In Chicago, playgrounds located near racially-based neighborhood boundaries witnessed the greatest conflicts over usage. Ethnic or racial groups would unofficially claim exclusive use of these contested spaces and when outsiders would test that exclusivity, unrest frequently ensued. Whites who laid claim to disputed playground areas enlisted the assistance of police to maintain their unofficial color line, while African Americans relied on using mass attendance to dissuade whites from using their facilities. The Parks Bureau in Chicago assisted in this de facto segregation of city parks, hiring racially homogenous staffs in their parks and discouraging the patronage of African Americans at white-staffed facilities. According to Allan Spear, “[d]uring the summer of 1919, the Colts [a notorious Irish gang] and other young white hoodlums regularly attacked Negro boys who attempted to use the baseball diamonds in Washington Park.” Moreover, “Negro groups that ventured into Fuller Park or Armour Square were assaulted even when accompanied by adult leaders.”⁵⁴ In other cities, white officials denied African Americans access to recreation facilities or portions thereof.⁵⁵ When African American groups were able to

⁵³ On the related development of black-owned resorts, see Mark S. Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945” *Journal of Negro History* 84 (Spring 1999): 130-149.

⁵⁴ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 206. See also, Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 110.

⁵⁵ Bathing facilities, pools, and beaches were frequently hotspots in these local battles for access to public sites. Quillan, *The Color Line*, 126; “Would Deny Bathing Privileges” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 17 June 1932; “At Buckeye Lake” *The Crisis* 17, 92; “Public Bathing in Pittsburgh” *The Crisis* 39 (February 1932), 57. Patricia A. Turner has described how a color line dispute at a local Chicago beach, coupled with

utilize these public spaces, they were overcharged for concession items and forced to use the less desirable areas of the space.⁵⁶

Violence over recreational spaces also found expression in the practice of the “African dodger,” a popular pursuit among white amusement park patrons. An attraction at numerous fairs and festivals, this practice involved an African American man placing his head in an opening, while white fairgoers threw baseballs at his head. The black man would try to duck “or dodge” to avoid being hit by the onslaught of baseballs. Although this practice was outlawed in some areas, notably New York, the African dodger placed African Americans in a position of vulnerability and highlighted the inherent dangers in something as seemingly innocuous as leisure pursuits.⁵⁷ This abhorrent practice was immortalized in a short 1931 film entitled *The African Dodger* and later featured in a

strained race relations, developed into a race riot in 1919. See Turner, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 50.

⁵⁶ “At Buckeye Lake” *The Crisis* 17, 92, “Public Bathing in Pittsburgh” *The Crisis*, 57; Pilz, “The Beginnings of Organized Play for Black America,” 64.

⁵⁷ “New York Puts Ban on ‘African Dodger’” *Chicago Defender*, 24 April 1915. *The Defender*, reporting on the new prohibition of the African Dodger in New York, challenged other localities to take similar action. “Chicago and other cities that complain of the same trouble should get busy.” Despite the ban, New York Times articles from the 1920s mention the African Dodger as a still-popular sideshow attraction. See “300,000 at Coney, 3,000 Sport in Surf” *New York Times*, 22 May 1922; “In September The County Fair Blooms” *New York Times*, 11 September 1927. A 1926 *Life* article compared the United States to an African Dodger. According to E.S. Martin, the United States was “in the position of the Negro who puts his head through the hole in the canvas at the fair for persons who pay to throw baseballs at him.” In the analogy, “Europe” was the patron aiming the baseballs at the United States. E.S. Martin, *Life*, December 2, 1925, 24.

Spencer Tracy movie, *Dante's Inferno*.⁵⁸ In the late 1940s, the first African Americans to play integrated baseball matches faced a similar threat. Under the auspices of competition, hostile white pitchers would at times intentionally throw at the head of the opposing black batter.⁵⁹

During the interwar period, race leaders advocated the establishment of black enterprises within urban centers as a means to combat Jim Crow. African American political leaders believed that these black business ventures would allow black consumers to avoid the discriminatory practices that they encountered during transactions with white merchants.⁶⁰ These businesses would also benefit the black economy by creating jobs for other African Americans.

Black baseball was one such enterprise. Founded by Rube Foster in 1920, the Negro National League grappled with the competing demands of benefiting the race and

⁵⁸ Similarly, the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago featured a sideshow game called "African Dips." This game echoed that of the African Dodger. For the African Dips, a contestant was given a ball to throw at a target. If the contestant successfully managed to hit the target with the ball, a " 'colored man' in a little cage was dropped into a tank of water." Philip McGowan, *American Vaudeville: Seeing and Reading American Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 67. An article in the *New York Times* disclosed that the "African Dips" had generated approximately \$23,000 in revenue. It is listed as the fifth most profitable game in the 1933 World's Fair. See "Revenue of Fair Put at \$35,000,000" *New York Times*, 3 November 1933.

⁵⁹ Roy Campanella, interview by Stephen Banker, in *Black Diamonds: An Oral History of Negro Baseball* (Washington: Tapes for Readers, 1978, 1992), audiocassette.

⁶⁰ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 36-38, 148-149; Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 155-159, 164-165; Spear, *Black Chicago*, ix, 130, 167.

turning a profit.⁶¹ For many African Americans, especially members of the black press, race ownership of league teams and facilities was a crucial aspect of its success and value. Ira Lewis, writing for *The Competitor*, noted that the fate of the nascent Negro National League would have implications for other black businesses. According to Lewis, “[t]he workings of this league will be watched with more than passing interest by everyone, if it is successful, as we all hope, look for a further merging of colored business interests on a national scale.”⁶² In 1921, Lewis, reflecting on the success of the League and the beginning of a new baseball season, suggested that the black baseball was becoming a true race business. “Western colored baseball has shaken off the yoke of the white man’s control, almost completely, and the colored man of the East will do the same thing within a few years.”⁶³

⁶¹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 105-106. Ribowsky has argued that Foster touted the Negro National League as a race enterprise to engender good will and drive any competitors out of business, rather than out of an altruistic commitment to racial uplift. On another contemporary black institution, black insurance companies, see Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Black Business in a Black Metropolis: The Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). The founder of the CMAC, Robert Cole, purchased the Chicago American Giants in 1932. Al Monroe, “What Say” *Chicago Defender*, 9 July 1932; “There Will Be Baseball Here; Who’ll Have Club” *Chicago Defender*, 27 January 1934; Al Monroe, “Sporting Around” *Chicago Defender*, 5 May 1934.

⁶² Ira F. Lewis, “National Baseball League Formed” *The Competitor* (March 1920), 67. The same issue of *The Competitor* also featured an article extolling the work of the Virginia Negro Business League and urging African Americans to use their collective power as consumers and business people for “their own racial benefit.” George W. Blount, “The Virginia State Negro Business League” *The Competitor* (March 1920), 26.

⁶³ Ira F. Lewis, “‘New’ League Not Needed” *The Competitor* (May 1921), 39.

Lewis's pronouncement would prove to be overly optimistic. For Negro League team owners, fulfilling the obligations of a true "black enterprise" was difficult or impossible. As was the case with other black enterprises, African American business owners lacked sufficient capital to independently operate.⁶⁴ From the very beginning, most Negro League owners simply could not afford to purchase and maintain their own baseball stadium. Consequently, team owners had to enter into rental agreements with white park owners in order to stage games. These rental agreements were often facilitated through the use of a small number of powerful white booking agents. Black sportswriters frequently named one of these agents, Nat Strong, as a symbol of the unnecessary interference of white sporting figures in black baseball.⁶⁵ Without Strong's

⁶⁴ For a case study, see Vignola, "The Enemies at the Gate," 71-81. Black business owners interviewed by Drake and Cayton reported that they suffered because of a lack of buying power, inadequate credit with wholesalers, and insufficient capital. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 445-449.

⁶⁵ Ira F. Lewis, "'New' League Not Needed" *The Competitor* (May 1921), 39, 41; W. Rollo Wilson, "Eastern Snapshots" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 June 1924; Cum Posey, "The Sportive Realm" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 January 1927; W. Rollo Wilson, "Sports Shots" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 April 1927; "Negro Baseball" *The Brown American* (Fall-Winter 1942), 5, 19. At least one former player recalled that Strong doctored the baseballs when one of the teams he was promoting faced a club that he did not have a vested interest in. Judy Johnson, interview by Banker, *Black Diamonds*, Cassette #1, Side Two. In the 1940s, Ed Gottlieb, the white owner of the Philadelphia Stars baseball club, attracted the ire of prominent *Courier* sportswriter Wendell Smith. Smith argued that Gottlieb unfairly discriminated against African Americans in establishing his basketball team. Despite owning a black baseball team, Gottlieb refused to support integration for professional basketball. Smith, "'Brother Eddie' Gottlieb Was There" *Pittsburgh Courier* (date unclear), found in Wendell Smith Papers, NBHFM; Smith, "The Strange Case of 'Brother' Gottlieb" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 February 1947, Wendell Smith Papers, NBHFM.

assistance, Negro League teams were unable to secure necessary bookings or park rentals. Thus, team owners depended on Strong for their financial survival. Even within the league organization, there was white influence. In some cases, team owners themselves were white.⁶⁶

From the inception of the National Negro League in 1920, black professional teams entered into contracts with white Major League and semi-professional clubs in order to use their facilities.⁶⁷ Under these agreements, Negro League teams would have use of the stadiums while the white team was away in exchange for either a fee or a cut of the gate, concession, and parking receipts. Numerous Negro League teams engaged in such arrangements: the Black Yankees and New York All-Stars competed in Yankees Stadium; the Homestead Grays in Clark Griffith Stadium in Washington D.C.; the Brooklyn Eagles at Ebbets Field; and the Chicago American Giants in White Sox

⁶⁶ J. L. Wilkinson was the most prominent white owner in the Negro Leagues. Although players generally regarded Wilkinson as fair and evenhanded, they did note that he did not relinquish his room when his players were forbidden from staying at a segregated hotel. The players camped in tents, while Wilkinson lodged indoors. See Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 85-86, 143-144. For players' recollections of Wilkinson, see Bill Drake, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 28, 31;

⁶⁷ Ira F. Lewis, " 'New' League Not Needed" *The Competitor*, May 1921, 39

Stadium.⁶⁸ These arrangements were often beneficial for all involved. The white major league stadiums had big capacities, and therefore, could entertain larger crowds. Moreover, each party profited from the large gate receipts.

In at least one instance, however, the white park management raised the ire of assembled black fans. In 1926, an employee at Clark Griffith Stadium halted a game moments before it was due to start. Fans had already gathered to see the white Community League All Stars and the black Ledroit Tigers, when park manager William Smith “came upon the field and forbade the contest on the ground that colored and white teams were not allowed to play together.”⁶⁹ In an open letter to Washington Senators owner Clark Griffith, Neval Thomas called on Griffith to “announce to your staff that such discrimination is not your policy” in order to appease the “thousands of daily colored patrons” who contributed to Griffith’s coffers through their attendance at games featuring the Grays and other black professional and semi-professional teams.⁷⁰ Thomas

⁶⁸ David Malarcher, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 45. The Cuban Stars used the Cincinnati Reds’ park, Redland Field, during the 1921 season. Ira F. Lewis, “Baseball Men Hold Successful Meeting” *The Competitor* (January-February 1921), 52. On the New York All-Stars and Yankee Stadium, see “Colored Team to Open in Yankee Stadium” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 18 April 1931. On the other rental arrangements and the economic climate, see Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 209.

⁶⁹ Neval H. Thomas, “Protest is Sent to Griffith” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 September 1926.

⁷⁰ For a pre-integration look at Griffith’s career in the white major leagues, see Bob Considine and Shirely Povich, “The Old Fox Turns Magnate: Baseball’s Red-Eyed Magnate and Arch-Conservative” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 20, 1940, 18-24.

and other fans stung by discriminatory practices found they had recourse through the threat of withholding patronage.⁷¹

During the Great Depression, these business relationships became even more important for both Negro League teams and major league park owners. Wary of worsening economic conditions, major league park owners began to depend on the extra revenue raised through rentals to the Negro Leagues and greatly desired to maintain those working relationships.⁷² With the exception of Pittsburgh Crawfords' owner Gus

⁷¹ Neval H. Thomas, "Protest is Sent to Griffith" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 September 1926.

⁷² White teams had great financial incentives to rent out their stadiums while away. Alexander points out that during the Depression, white teams, in particular, needed to find funds in any manner possible. Even with the improved financial situation of World War II, white major league baseball continued to battle for profitability. With a number of white team rosters decimated by the draft and voluntary enlistments, major league clubs struggled to attract a sufficient number of paying fans. Consequently, the rental income from Negro League clubs was even more valuable to white team owners. In 1942, owners of the New York Yankees made \$100,000 off of renting out Yankee Stadium for Negro League games. Ribowsky, *Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 251. Satchel Paige provides a different interpretation in his memoir, arguing that Negro Leagues teams pushed the white teams to open their stadiums. According to Paige, the crowds that came to witness his exploits were too large for the usual Negro League stadiums, so black baseball managers had to look elsewhere to accommodate Paige's legion of fans. Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, 66; Paige, interview by Banker, in *Black Diamonds*, Cassette #1, Side One. Paige's explanation was consistent with his public persona as a trickster figure in black baseball. Paige's claim of his own popularity among baseball fans reflected a boasting tradition inherent in black vernacular expressive culture and signifying practice. The importance of trickster tales and behaviors will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Greenlee, most Negro League team owners continued to experience limited cash flow and remained dependent on these rental arrangements.⁷³

These arrangements often put African American fans at a disadvantage. Black sports were popular with white fans. White fans attended all-black baseball games and “battle royals” boxing matches featuring two African American fighters. Battle royals drew a great number of spectators, both black and white.⁷⁴ Similarly, black baseball owners and officials welcomed white patrons and their money to league games.

Despite their promotion of black baseball as a race enterprise, league owners signed rental contracts that required segregated seating in order to secure the use of large ballparks. Many stadium owners and officials, particularly those in more southern cities like St. Louis and Baltimore, maintained preferential seating for white fans.⁷⁵ In these instances, much like at the Harlem music and nightclubs, white fans enjoyed prime seating at a black performance.⁷⁶ In a number of parks, black fans witnessed games in

⁷³ Greenlee financed the construction of a home field for his Crawfords in 1932. The significance of this investment will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

⁷⁴ The fighters in these bouts often were amateurs and engaged in clowning in order to entertain the crowds. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*, 59-65.

⁷⁵ Bill Drake, interview by Holway, in *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 30; Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 123, emphasis original. See also Alton King, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 107.

⁷⁶ On Harlem nightclubs and segregation, see David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 1979), 105-106, 209-210; Osofsky, *The Making of a Ghetto*, 185. Langston Hughes lamented the degree of white ownership and control in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s. According to Hughes, “The famous nightclubs were owned by whites, as were the theatres.... White downtown [was] pulling all the strings in Harlem... Black Harlem really was in white

the bleachers under the elements while white fans enjoyed the grandstand seats under covers and awnings.⁷⁷ According to Bill Drake, a Negro League player in the 1910s and 1920s, when his squad played at St. Louis's Sportsmen's Park, "Negroes had to sit in the pavilion in right field and in the bleachers. Negroes didn't go in the grandstand."⁷⁸ Another Negro Leaguer, Cool Papa Bell, recalled a physical barrier enforcing segregation. Bell described baseball fields where the officials "would have a rope to put

face, economically speaking." Hughes "In Love With Harlem" (1963) reprinted in Milton Meltzer, ed., *In Their Own Words: A History of the American Negro 1916-1966* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 47.

⁷⁷ David Nasaw describes a class-based ethnic segregation for white major league games. According to Nasaw, "[t]he division of the park into separately priced sections resulted in de facto ethnic segregation, with the Irish and German Americans in the bleachers, and the rest of the crowd in the more expensive grandstand, pavilion, and box seats." Consequently, the "cheap section" of various ballparks (including Chicago's White Sox Park, St. Louis's Sportsmen's Park, and New York's Polo Grounds) were named for the predominately Irish fans who occupied those seats. In this, as in other instances in Jim Crow America, race trumped class. Thus, black fans occupied segregated seating regardless of their ability to afford preferred seating. Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 100. Notably, at the Joe Louis-Primo Carnera fight in 1935, the majority of African American spectators were confined to the bleacher section, although "there were many *scattered* throughout the stands and a *few* occupied ringside seats." In addition to this partial segregation, the New York Times observed that there were policemen stationed every ten feet within the bleacher sections. Tellingly, the grandstands only had "scattered" policemen. One assumes they were "scattered" in a similar manner as the African American patrons. Fred Van Ness, "Distinguished Gathering Throngs Stadium for Heavyweight Battle" *New York Times*, 26 June 1935, 24, emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ Bill Drake, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 30.

across the stands” in order to separate fans by race.⁷⁹ As late as 1948, Negro League players remembered black fans being confined to segregated sections in baseball parks, in one instance with chicken wire.⁸⁰

African Americans faced different degrees of segregation and accommodation within black baseball stadiums. In at least one instance, team owners promoted the fact that black fans would have access to seating usually reserved with white patrons. In 1909, a *Defender* article on a Cuban Stars- Leland Giants game in White Sox Stadium repeatedly emphasized that the honored guest, Mrs. Booker T. Washington, received priority seating. For this one game, officials had arranged “special reserved seats for Mrs. Booker T. Washington...giving everyone a chance to seem a real all-round race woman.”⁸¹

In contrast, other black baseball team owners highlighted segregated seating in an attempt to bring in white spectators and to placate local officials who were antagonistic to the idea of integrated public leisure spaces. The owners of the Baltimore Black Sox required that Maryland Park (where the Black Sox competed) had a “section of box seats *for whites only*.”⁸² Smaller regional semi-pro black baseball contests also advertised similar accommodations. One advertisement promoting the Rocky Hill Tigers and East

⁷⁹ James “Cool Papa” Bell, interview by Arthur Shaffer and Charles Korr, University of Missouri-St. Louis Oral History Program. September 8, 1971. Transcript, in “Cool Papa” Bell player file, Ashland Collection, National Baseball NBHFM, 28.

⁸⁰ Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White*, 79; Wilmer Fields, *My Life in the Negro Leagues* (Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1992), 68.

⁸¹ “Cuban Stars and Leland Giants” *Chicago Defender*, 31 July 1909, 1.

⁸² Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 123, emphasis original.

Point Red Sox highlighted a “reserve stand for white people.”⁸³ Similarly, ads in the 1932 *Norfolk Journal and Guide* included a warning that “part of grandstand reserved for white patrons.”⁸⁴

Conversely, the Kansas City Monarch’s Muehlebach Field had an open seating policy during Negro League games.⁸⁵ Kansas City baseball fans held a special regard for the Monarchs and strongly supported them. Consequently, the Monarch’s success on the field and in fostering a large, loyal mixed-race fan base made them an integral part of the city. Opening Day for the Monarchs was a citywide celebration, complete with a parade that shut down the main traffic arteries, a band performance at the ball park, a flag raising that employed five hundred boy scouts, and an opening pitch from the mayor of Kansas City, Missouri to the mayor of Kansas City, Kansas. City officials even went so far as to allow all city employees a half-day holiday so that they could attend the opener.⁸⁶ The Monarchs and Muehlebach Field were an exception within Kansas City. Most other public amusements remained segregated and Muehlebach Field itself employed segregated seating when the all-white Kansas City Blues took the field.⁸⁷

⁸³ Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White*, 68.

⁸⁴ “Great Base Ball Attraction” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 2 September 1932; “Base Ball Extraordinary” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 2 September 1932; “Base Ball Championship Game” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 9 September 1932.

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Catching Dreams*, 53.

⁸⁶ “22,000 Fans Expected To Attend Kansas City Opener” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 May 1925, 13.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 52. During a short period of time in the mid 1930s, the Blues allowed integrated seating. Once owner Johnny Kling sold the club in 1938, segregated seating returned.

In many instances, black fans attending Negro League games held in white stadiums required a significant amount of travel. Because most major league parks were located in the white sections of town, transportation was an issue for African Americans who traveled to the games. At times, public transportation would shut down the routes to the black neighborhoods before the end of the game, essentially stranding some fans. Even if they could successfully arrange transportation to the game, the work schedules of many fans made the consequent time commitment untenable. In addition, black fans had to deal with spending their limited leisure time in what could be “hostile” space, neighborhoods that discouraged their patronage. Under Jim Crow, such travels could incite violence and therefore were dangerous.⁸⁸

In the years following World War I, the politics of black baseball became more significant for its fans. As African American servicemen returned from duty and northern cities continued to swell with newly arrived southern migrants, African Americans began to place a greater degree of importance on their ability to establish and maintain black businesses and institutions.⁸⁹ In particular, the black leadership, in the press, in the church, and in politics, called for African Americans to purchase property, to claim a physical space in the city as their own. In the March 1925 issues of *Survey Graphic*, James Weldon Johnson lauded the exponential growth in black property

⁸⁸ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 211-213; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 91, 104-106

⁸⁹ On 1919 racial violence, calls for increased democracy at home, and the return of World War I black servicemen, see Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, 15-24. Robert L. Boyd has demonstrated that black businesses increased in number as local black populations increased within racially segregated sections of northern cities. Boyd, “Residential Segregation by Race and the Black Merchants of Northern Cities During the Early Twentieth Century” *Sociological Forum* 13 (December 1998): 595-609.

ownership in Harlem as a symbol of African American success. "Twenty years ago Negroes were begging for the privilege of renting a flat in Harlem...Today Negro Harlem is practically owned by Negroes."⁹⁰ Johnson also mentioned that black Harlemites were involved in fostering black enterprise. "Harlem is gradually becoming more and more a self-supporting community, Negroes there are steadily branching out into new businesses and enterprises in which Negroes are employed."⁹¹ Despite Johnson's optimism, other African American intellectuals noted that black business in Harlem was constrained by a lack of sufficient capital. In the same issue, Kelly Miller noted that:

[b]usiness is the last place in which prejudice shows itself, and it is in this field that its harvest is least manifest...In Harlem, as in every other large city, the Negro proprietor conducts mainly sumptuary establishments such as eating-houses, barber-shops, beauty parlors, pool rooms, and such places as cater immediately to the appetite or to the taste. The more substantial stores which require a larger exercise of the imagination, such as those dealing in dry goods, shoes, furniture, hardware and groceries, are usually in the hands of whites. Race prejudice will sooner or later lead to race patronage in business.⁹²

For black baseball devotees, these politics and concerns played out over the issue of property ownership.⁹³ Rube Foster, universally acknowledged as the father of black

⁹⁰ James Weldon Johnson, "The Making of Harlem" *Survey Graphic*, Marcy 1925, 638.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁹² Kelly Miller, "The Harvest of Race Prejudice" *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 711. Miller goes on to note that race patronage "awaits the time when the Negro shall have developed the business aptitude to compete with the white dealer, who is shrewd enough to hold prejudice in restraint for the sake of trade." 712.

⁹³ African Americans also placed a great deal of value on the ownership of church property. In the late 1910s, white churches in Chicago began to relocate in response to the growing black population. Churches located in or near what would become the black belt sold their facilities to black congregations. Gaining

baseball, was embroiled in a controversy over the ownership of the field where his Chicago American Giants competed in the late 1910s. Foster had an agreement with John Schorling, a white Chicago businessman, and Charles Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox, to allow him to claim “ownership” of Schorling Field, despite the fact that Comiskey truly owned the park.⁹⁴ Under the terms of their agreement, Comiskey’s involvement was shielded from public knowledge. Schorling served as “operator of record,” while Foster was granted ownership title to the grandstand section

ownership of church buildings held a great deal of importance for the parishioners. The procurement and establishment of black churches as black-owned entities reinforced the commitment to buy black and support black enterprise. Consequently, the purchase of a church building was cause for celebration. In late 1910s, the Olivet Baptist Church bought a former white Baptist church resulting in the “members...staging a parade of thousands that stretched from Dearborn Street to South Park Way.” Best, *Passionately Human*, 47. Even earlier, in 1905, the editor of *Alexander’s Magazine* advocated church ownership, bemoaning the fact that “not a single Negro church [in Boston] is owned by its congregation.” *Alexander’s Magazine*, 15 May 1905, 42. Similarly, the author of a 1921 article in *The Competitor* lauded the benefit of church ownership for African Americans, noting that black church holdings were valued at 76 million dollars. Walter S. Buchanan, “Race Progress and Race Adjustment” *The Competitor* (June 1921), 10-11. See also, Johnson, “The Making of Harlem,” 637; George E. Haynes, “The Church and the Negro Spirit” *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 695-697, 708. At least one commentator, Ernest Rice McKinney, objected to African Americans’ investment into churches and church property. McKinney argued that black communities needed to invest in business rather than religion in order to hasten racial prosperity. Jeffrey P. Moran, “Reading Race into the Scopes Trial: African American Elites, Science, and Fundamentalism” *Journal of American History* 89 (December 2003): 910.

⁹⁴ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 74-77.

of the Park.⁹⁵ Under this arrangement, Foster claimed to own Schorling Park and neglected to mention the involvement of Schorling or Comiskey.

For Foster, who had promoted his new Negro National League as a venture for racial uplift and progress, it was crucial to function successfully without financial contributions from white business interests. Consistent with the politics of the time, Foster was intent on framing black baseball as a truly black enterprise, one that only African Americans would truly profit from and be invested in. The black press and blackball fans embraced Foster's venture partially because of the importance they placed upon the financial success of black business.⁹⁶ At the time, black churches and the black press in Chicago championed the idea of a "Double Duty Dollar," money that was spent to both acquire an item and contribute to the success of "the race."⁹⁷ In addition, periodicals like *Half-Century Magazine*, highlighted profitable black enterprise and property ownership as the solution for "the mire of prejudice and scorn."⁹⁸ Consequently, in order to continue to benefit from the integration of politics and baseball, Foster endeavored to keep his silent partners very silent.

Foster's reticence proved to be well-founded. In 1919, an article lauding Foster and his achievements, highlighting the construction of Schorling Park as one of Foster's

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹⁶ Black sportswriters often critiqued black baseball for any connections with white businessmen and encouraged all-black ownership of Negro League ventures. Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 11-12. Yet, in the case of Foster, most of the Chicago black press kept quiet about his ties to white business in order to support Foster's black enterprise. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 74-75.

⁹⁷ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 431.

⁹⁸ "A Monument to Racial Industry" *Half-Century Magazine*, November-December 1922, 3, 15.

finest moments, appeared in *Half-Century Magazine*.⁹⁹ In the feature, Howard Phelps, avoided any discussion of who built the park or the origin of the financing for such a venture. Shortly after its publication, an angry writer accused Foster of covering up the fact that Schorling Park was under “Jewish” ownership.¹⁰⁰ By choosing to highlight that Foster’s associate was Jewish, the writer capitalized on the strained relationship between African Americans and Jewish businessmen in Chicago and therefore leveled what he believed to be a truly damning claim that could have alienated Foster’s black fan base. Many business owners in the “Bronzeville” district of Chicago were Jewish and black residents resented their presence in the neighborhoods.¹⁰¹

Half-Century quickly came to Foster’s defense, arguing that the owner of Schorling Park was in fact not Jewish and downplaying the involvement of local white interests in the Park. According to the rebuttal by Frank Young, long time sports editor of the *Chicago Defender* and Foster ally, the park was “not owned by a Jew” but “by a retired doctor, now a millionaire living in Europe.” In Young’s version, Comiskey had leased the park from the millionaire physician prior to establishing White Sox Park. With

⁹⁹ “His next big achievement consisted in the building of the American Giants present home, the finest semi-professional ball park in the world. It was constructed for Foster’s team and he prides himself in that it was expressly built and used only by him.” Howard A. Phelps, “Andrew ‘Rube’ Foster” *The Half-Century Magazine* (March 1919): 8.

¹⁰⁰ Gale Williams “About Foster’s Baseball Team” *The Half-Century Magazine* (April 1919): 17. Williams expressed concern that “Colored men overlook moneymaking propositions such as the American Giants baseball team.”

¹⁰¹ In 1938, these tensions reached a climax when a small black periodical made derogatory comments about Jewish business owners and promoted the expulsion of Jewish residents and business owners from “Bronzeville.” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 432, 445-453.

little need for the facility, Comiskey in turn leased the grounds to Schorling, who constructed the park in collaboration with Foster.¹⁰² Although Young's evasive article helped to diminish the controversy over Foster's connection with powerful white businessmen, Foster's reprieve was brief. Two years later, Foster would come under fire when a fellow Negro League owner, Tenny Blount, revealed the name of Foster's silent partner, John Schorling, in a newspaper interview.¹⁰³ This time, Foster had no choice but to address the charges, telling reporters that Schorling was his landlord at the baseball field and thus received rent from the Chicago American Giants.¹⁰⁴ While this admission of white involvement did not permanently damage Foster's reputation or his league, it did make black baseball less useful as a political tool for African Americans.¹⁰⁵ Moreover,

¹⁰² Frank Young, "More About Foster's Baseball Team" *The Half-Century Magazine* (June 1919): 8.

¹⁰³ Foster was not the only black ball owner to cover up financial partnerships and arrangements with white business interests. Bill Drake recalled that when he was with the St. Louis Giants, owner Charles Mills had an agreement with Ed Brock, a local white businessman, who helped him gain access to Finley Park.

"Charles Mills owned the Giants then. He was a saloon keeper, but he had a white fellow in the background named Ed Brock...He's the one got us into that park." Drake, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 29.

¹⁰⁴ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 117.

¹⁰⁵ Foster managed to weather the storm quite well. In 1926, Foster was truck by a sudden and incapacitating illness, which resulted in his commitment to a psychiatric hospital. Public concern regarding Foster's personal tragedy shielded him from any criticism in the black press. Thus, a 1931 article by black sportswriter Frank A. Young, glossed over Foster's management of the Chicago American Giants and attributed the downfall of black baseball in Chicago to Schorling and his white successors. Frank A. Young, "A Digest of the Sports World," *Chicago Defender*, 29 August 1931. Black press coverage in the 1930s constructed the myth of Foster as the sole founder of the Negro National League. Consequently, the important role of Indianapolis A.B.C. owner C.I. Taylor was erased from the public memory. For

because of baseball's significance to the black community in Chicago, the loss of Foster's field as a success story damaged the political and economic value of black baseball within the city.¹⁰⁶ True black ownership of Negro League teams and parks was from this point forward the ultimate goal of many in the black press and black baseball community.

The fight to secure black ownership of black leisure spaces only increased through the 1920s and 1930s. The black press played a crucial role in the escalation of demands for black ownership and the eventual integration of baseball. As part of the campaign to encourage black ownership of baseball facilities and to speed the slow pace of integration, black sportswriters conducted campaigns to persuade black fans to boycott

contemporary accounts of Taylor's involvement in the founding of the NNL, see sports coverage in *The Competitor*, all of the 1920 issues. For more on Foster's public persona as an unimpeachable and indefatigable advocate for black baseball, see Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 136-138.

¹⁰⁶ Chicago baseball struggled after Foster's death in 1930. The team was sold to a group of white investors who hoped to bankrupt the team and open a "dog race track." After two years of ownership and failure to obtain permission to establish a track, the Chicago club did not play in 1931, leaving Chicago, the symbolic center of organized black baseball under Rube Foster without a competitive Negro League team. Frank A. Young, "A Digest of the Sports World" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 August 1931. Michael Lomax argues that a lack of related business development in Chicago was significant in preventing the Giants from establishing themselves as a successful race enterprise. "Black Baseball, Black Community, Black Entrepreneurs: The History of the Negro National and Eastern Colored Leagues, 1880-1930" (PhD diss, Ohio State University, 1996), 503. As mentioned previously, a black Chicago businessman, Robert Cole, purchased the Giants in 1934. See footnote 37, this chapter. Because of Foster's widespread involvement in other league teams, the impact of his death was felt beyond Chicago. Particularly in Detroit, Foster's death contributed to the demise of the Negro National League Detroit Stars. On Foster and the Stars, see Richard Bak, *Turkey Stearnes and the Detroit Stars: The Negro Leagues in Detroit, 1919-1933* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 178-179.

major league baseball games. *Courier* sportswriter W. Rollo Wilson sounded the alarm in the 1920s, encouraging his readers to shun the Philadelphia Athletics due to a history of discriminatory policies and racist behavior by club officials and team members like Ty Cobb.¹⁰⁷ Wilson asked *Courier* readers to consider such actions when they were deciding which team to patronize. If they insisted on attending major league games, Wilson suggested that they consider the Phillies who had a better record in regards to the treatment of the black press.¹⁰⁸

In the late 1930s, the campaign to protest the restrictive racial policies of the major leagues gained steam. Led by Wendell Smith, *Pittsburgh Courier* sports editor and major player in Jackie Robinson's signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers, black sportswriters utilized their columns to point out the inequities of the baseball color line. Again echoing popular boycotting campaigns in cities, these writers urged African Americans to stay home from white games, thus not contributing to an industry that refused to grant them entrance.¹⁰⁹ Smith chastised African Americans for their patronage of the major league:

The fact that major league baseball refuses to admit Negro players within its folds makes the question just that much more perplexing. Surely, it's sufficient reason

¹⁰⁷ Ironically, black baseball players often singled out the Philadelphia Athletics' manager, Connie Mack, as a sympathetic and complimentary white official. For more on Mack and his relationship with black baseball players, see Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁸ W. Rollo Wilson, "Sports Shots" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 April 1931. See also, "Knoxville Fans Decide to Stay Away" *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1932.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of African American boycotts and their connection with the campaigns of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 41-43.

for us to quit spending our money and time in their ball parks. Major league baseball does not want us. It never has. Still, we continue to help support his institution that places a bold "Not Welcome" sign over its thriving portal and refuse to patronize the very place that has shown that it is more than welcome to have us. We black folks are a strange tribe!¹¹⁰

Similarly, the *Crisis* editorialized two years later, "Baseball is a million dollar business.

As are most big businesses, it is a jim-crow affair. And as most big businesses do, it take in hundreds of thousands of dollars from Black men and gives nothing in return."¹¹¹

During the Depression, "don't buy where you can't work" campaign to the leisure arena became even more critically important for African American activists, fans, and players. Although in some regions of the country the Negro League games attracted numerous white fans, black fans were and remained the foundation of black baseball. Thus, as sporting fans of all races had increasingly limited budgets of time and money to spend on leisure activities, black fans could place financial pressure on team owners and officials to establish themselves as enterprises that benefited local black communities.

¹¹⁰ Wendell Smith, "A Strange Tribe" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 May 1938, reprinted in David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 136.

¹¹¹ *The Crisis* (June 1940): 180. In the 1940s, these calls for an economic boycott of the major leagues were tied to the larger cause of domestic civil rights. In a 1942 *Defender* article, the author intimated that African American consumers could potentially hasten baseball integration, but acknowledged the many obstacles inherent in combating the color line. "More, too, we continue to pour our money into the box offices without any return. The owners believe we are satisfied. Hurt their pocketbook by staying away as long as the Negro ball player is kept out of the game and maybe we'll get somewhere. I said maybe. This is America and despite the fact we are engaged in a war of freedom of all peoples (?), the color line or racial lines when it affects a Negro, has never been erased." "Baseball Season Over: No Big League Tryouts" *Chicago Defender*, 10 October 1942.

From a standpoint of fostering racial pride and identity, black baseball was also crucial. Numerous black baseball players and writers recall their earliest baseball memories centering on white players like Babe Ruth rather than black baseball icons such as Rube Foster.¹¹² By supporting black baseball, African Americans could help construct an alternative to the widespread popular image of baseball as a white's man game. Moreover, Smith and his fellow sportswriters rightly acknowledged that black fans could place financial pressure on major league baseball. The major leagues opened their doors to African American players in part to expand their share of the black urban market.

In the 1930s, many Negro League teams sought to find more amenable and less-costly locations for their games. The New York Cubans established a home field, Dyckman Oval, located near Harlem.¹¹³ Similarly, the Cleveland Buckeyes competed at Luna Park during the 1932 season. The black press applauded the location of Luna Park and the corresponding benefits to local fans: "Within comfortable walking distance for better than 15,000 colored residents, and accessible via of three of the city's main street

¹¹² Art Rust, Jr., *Get That Nigger Off the Field!: A Sparkling, Informal History of the Black Man in Baseball* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976), Max Manning, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 67; Holloway, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 62; James Crutchfield, interview by Banker, *Black Diamonds*, Cassette #2, Side One; Mitchell, "This is Me! I'm Somebody!," 80.

¹¹³ Dan Parker, "Ebbets Field Goes High Yellow" *Daily Mirror*, 19 May 1935; Jimmy Powers "The Powerhouse" *Daily News*, 4 February 1935 in Effa Manley file, Ashland Collection, NBHFM; Ribowsky, *Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 194. Unfortunately for Harlem baseball fans, local black baseball teams would soon have to travel because there was no "suitable field in Harlem." The 1938 Black Yankees used Yankee Stadium as a home field. "Twin Bill to Aid Charity" *New York Times*, 22 June 1938.

car routes, no park in Cleveland is more conveniently located.”¹¹⁴ Despite the favorable location of the park, the Cleveland club failed to attract much interest among city residents. At least one observer felt that the Cleveland ownership did not go far enough in terms of their commitment to the black community. Although they did patronize a favorable park, the ownership failed to hire significant portions of the populace to work for the organization. This failure to employ local residents was particularly galling due to the economic distress and widespread unemployment brought on by the Great Depression. African American fans in Cleveland not only wanted entertainment from black enterprise but also jobs.¹¹⁵

Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, was not content to merely rent a park in a black neighborhood. Instead, he found another method of ensuring the comfort of his fans. In 1932, Greenlee financed the construction of his own field in Pittsburgh.¹¹⁶ Named Greenlee Field after its less than humble patron, Greenlee Field was a rarity in Negro League baseball, a team-owned, and in this instance, a black-owned

¹¹⁴ “Cleveland Promised Greatest Baseball Season in History,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 April 1932.

¹¹⁵ “Comments on Cleveland’s E-W Ball Club,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 June 1932. This movement coincided with several similar boycott movements in Cleveland and foreshadowed the larger protests staged by the Future Outlook League in subsequent years. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 198-199, 205-225. Cleveland was not the only major Ohio city that failed to maintain a viable Negro League franchise. Residents of Columbus also tried and failed to establish a long-lasting Negro League club. Sol White, “Sol White’s Column of Baseball Dope” *Cleveland Advocate*, 19 April 1919; White, “Sol White’s Column of Baseball Dope” *Cleveland Advocate*, 02 August 1919.

¹¹⁶ Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, 213.

field. Not only was the field free of segregation, it was also located in the Hill District, a historically black segment of the city.¹¹⁷ The location of Greenlee Field eliminated one of the other major problems facing African American fans, transportation to and from the white section of town. Thus, fans were spared the difficulties and vulnerabilities inherent in traveling to hostile sections of the city to watch the Pittsburgh Crawfords compete. The club letterhead as well as the club bus highlighted the Crawfords' "own \$100,000 Greenlee Field."¹¹⁸

Greenlee, an astute if not often legal businessman, took advantage of the prestige inherent in owning his own field.¹¹⁹ Greenlee was a well-known numbers man in

¹¹⁷ The Hill District was home to many new migrants in Pittsburgh. "Where They Live" *The Brown American* 4 (September 1930), 5, 38-39; Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). For an interesting, contemporary study that examined black life in Pittsburgh at the beginning of the Great Migration, see Epstein, *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*. Writing in 1918, Epstein detailed the early stages of black migration to Pittsburgh.

¹¹⁸ "Crawfords to 'Carry On' in this Bus" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 February 1932; Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White*, 84. The letterhead also featured a picture of their team bus and individual headshots of the Crawford Players. Greenlee was notorious for raiding talent from other clubs and the ostentatious reminder of his wealth must have further alienated him from the rest of the Negro National League. On Greenlee's rise and fall as a powerbroker in the Negro National League, see Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 10-147.

¹¹⁹ Ribowsky describes him as having "introduced it[the black game] into a higher level of the underworld." Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 157. Black baseball counted among its owners a number of similar men, including Abe Manley owner of the Newark Eagles and Alexander Pompez. Pompez was a central figure in New York's prosecution of the Harlem number game. In 1937, Pompez "fled to Mexico" to avoid prosecution but returned in 1938 to face charges. "To Reveal How Policy Barons Juggle

Pittsburgh and became involved with Negro League baseball in order to provide a cover for his gambling operations. Number running was a popular and profitable business for numerous African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ Many black men and women spent a portion of their salaries on the numbers each week, hoping to strike it rich or at least improve their financial situations.

These number runners were both condemned and celebrated within African American communities. Some members of the black clergy and devout parishioners

Numbers" *Chicago Defender*, 24 July 1937; "Open Million Dollar Policy Racket Trial," *Chicago Defender*, 21 May 1938. See also Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 79; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 17; Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Black Business in a Black Metropolis: The Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985* (Indiana University Press, 1996), 62. Black boxers also had a close relationship with the policy game. One of Joe Louis's backers was a numbers man and Greenlee managed light heavyweight John Henry Lewis. "Joe Backed by Profits on 'Policy,'" *Chicago Defender*, 9 May 1936; "Experts Predict Joe Louis Will Be Denied Title Bout" *Chicago Defender*, 13 July 1935; "History is Being Made Here, Folks" *Chicago Defender*, 20 June 1936; "John Henry Lewis To Turn To Heavyweights, Gus Says" *Chicago Defender*, 16 July 1937. Major league baseball historically had been connected with gambling interests and corrupt political machines. Steven A. Reiss, "The Baseball Magnates and Urban Politics in the Progressive Era: 1895-1920" in idem., *The American Sporting Experience: A Historical Anthology of Sport in America* (Champaign, IL: Leisure Press, 1984): 271-290. The numbers racket also made its mark on professional football. Art Rooney was a numbers man in Pittsburgh before purchasing the Steelers. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 159. For an additional contemporary and white view of the policy racket, see J. Saunders Redding, "Playing the Numbers" *The North American Review* 238, December 1934, 533-542.

¹²⁰ Winthrop D. Lane authored an article on the popularity of the numbers game and other vice operations in Harlem during the 1920s. See Lane, "Ambushed in the City: The Grim Side of Harlem" *Survey Graphic*, March 1925: 692-694, 713. Numbers rackets advertised in the *Baltimore Afro-American* sports pages. For one example, see *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 May 1932.

shunned the numbers racket, arguing that gambling in all forms was immoral and antithetical to the goals of racial progress.¹²¹ Yet, many black leaders, both in and outside of the church, supported numbers men because of their willingness to employ African Americans both in their illegal policy games and in the legitimate businesses they established as fronts for their numbers involvement. Moreover, black number runners frequently invested in community endeavors, such as baseball teams, and generously contributed to charitable causes within their communities.¹²² At a time when black business was commended as crucial to success of the race, black political and church leaders were often unwilling to denigrate an industry that itself fueled some of the largest and most successful business ventures in black neighborhoods.¹²³

¹²¹ "Baptists to War on 'Numbers'" *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 June 1930.

¹²² J. Winston Harrington described the dilemma for Chicago ministers in relation to policy. Arguing for the legalization (and regulation) of the policy game, Harrington notes that "[a]s it is now a minister who gets a liberal donation to build ore redecorate his church from a man who got it through extra-legal means, puts himself on the spot. His followers begin to question his sincerity, for it seems that he condones the donor, that he's a hypocrite." If policy was legal, it would allow "the numbers nobility to aid worthwhile charities." Harrington, "Policy...What Do You Think About It?" *Chicago Defender*, 25 November 1939. See also, Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 484, 492. Although Chicagoan George Lambert had previously had support from an A.M.E. bishop in his campaign against policy, his 1939 attempt to re-energize the black clergy for his cause was unsuccessful. " "Stamp Out Numbers Racket' -Bishop Gregg", *Chicago Defender*, 1 October 1938; "Says Press, Clerics Won't Fight Policy" *Chicago Defender*, 4 March 1939.

¹²³ Harrington estimated that 10,000 black Chicago residents were employed in the policy game. "Policy" *Chicago Defender*, 25 November 1939.

Moreover, the economic downturn of the Great Depression did not significantly decrease the profitability of the policy racket. Thus, number runners retained their power and wealth despite the financial strains experienced by other African American merchants and businesspeople. Indeed, their unique ability to maintain their status and expand their wealth opened doors that previously had been closed to numbers men. In the 1930s, policy men entered into a higher level of African American society. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* noted in 1931, “suave and debonair racketeers [were] crashing exclusive D.C. society.”¹²⁴ As symbols of a successful race enterprise and as investors in their communities, numbers men were exalted as race leaders. Yet, race reformers continued to denounce policy men as purveyors of vice.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ “Suave and Debonair Racketeers Crashing Exclusive D.C. Society” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 9 May 1931. In 1938, however, the *Chicago Defender* reported that D.C. policy men believed that the federal government was targeting their businesses with the hopes of putting them in jail. The article also noted that “[o]f the known big-time operators of the game here, only one is a member of the Race. Many Race members, however, are chief aides and lesser cogs in the \$2,000,000 annual racket.” Those men “fear for their bosses, their jobs and the racket.” “Policy Barons Fear Racket on Way Out in Washington” *Chicago Defender*, 26 November 1938.

¹²⁵ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 470-494. In some black districts, notably Harlem, whites actually ran most of the vice operations patronized by black residents. According to Marcy Sack, almost all Harlem saloons and prostitution houses were owned by whites. Langston Hughes noted that many of the policy rackets were also run by whites. Consequently, black numbers runners were relatively rare and represented endangered black enterprise within the underground and illicit economy of vice. As Hughes stated, “Negroes could not even play their own numbers with their own people. And almost all the policemen in Harlem were white. Negroes couldn’t even get graft from themselves for themselves by themselves.” Sack, “To Show Who Was in Charge,” 813; Hughes, “In Love with Harlem,” 47. See also, Harrington, “Policy,” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 492-494. *Defender* coverage of a 1938 trial of Harlem

Most crucially, Greenlee Field's existence held important symbolic meaning for African American fans and the Negro League players themselves.¹²⁶ With the field, an African American owned an impressive facility that visibly represented black success in a game that was supposed to be for whites' only. The large amount of money Greenlee invested in the field also contradicted stereotypes of the time. Greenlee had enough finances to bankroll a large construction project and continued to pour money into the field even after the opening. Greenlee's financial wherewithal was even more impressive within the context of the Depression. In an attempt to distinguish his field among other Negro League parks, Greenlee also invested in a permanent lighting system.¹²⁷

In choosing to allocate a portion of his money into lights for the park, Greenlee may have been influenced by the acclaim that Kansas City Monarchs' owner J.L. Wilkinson received for his portable lighting system. In 1930, only two years before the construction of Greenlee Field and at a time when Greenlee's Crawfords struggled to

number kings stressed that "[a]lthough the numbers game is considered a Harlem 'business' it is understood that the powers behind the throne live outside the district." "Open Million Dollar Policy Racket Trial" *Chicago Defender*, 21 May 1938.

¹²⁶ This is not to argue that Greenlee's motivation in building the field was to inspire his black clientele or to strike a blow against Jim Crow. Although by all accounts Greenlee was concerned with making black baseball a truly black enterprise, he also desired to bring more fans (black and white) to the ballpark to boost his bottom line and to symbolically win over his Pittsburgh rival, Cum Posey (owner of the Homestead Grays). Ribowsky discusses Greenlee's philosophy and feud with Posey in *A Complete History*, 162-168

¹²⁷ Greenlee's intercity rival, Cum Posey, used a portable lighting system in order to stage night games for the Grays. Posey utilized "floodlights" at Forbes Field for games against the House of David. "Grays vs. Detroit" and "To 'Show Way' to Grays-Davids" *Pittsburgh Courier* 14 May 1932.

break even financially and longed for the name recognition of the Homestead Grays, the Monarchs brought their lights to Pittsburgh for a series with the Grays.¹²⁸ Fans and press alike marveled at the size and novelty of a lighting system. The *Pittsburgh Courier* noted “[t]he night games have caused the fans to talk more of baseball lately than ever before...and it is believed that the crowds at all of the games will be the largest the Grays have ever performed before.”¹²⁹ The fact that Greenlee’s system was linked only to Greenlee Field enhanced the uniqueness and prestige of the ballpark.¹³⁰

For Negro League teams, the ability to stage games at night, especially in industrial cities was critical.¹³¹ The typical African American baseball fan worked long hours and could not attend early afternoon games. Through night baseball, the Negro

¹²⁸ For a history of the Crawfords’ early years and financial struggles, see Jim Bankes *The Pittsburgh Crawfords* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2001), 13-17. The Crawfords relied on donations through passing the hat during the 1930 and 1931 seasons. Unfortunately for the Crawfords, large numbers of fans did not guarantee a profitable return. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that a crowd of 6000 on Decoration Day only yielded about \$80, leaving the team without any cash after paying the umpires and the visiting team. C.E. Pendleton, “Public’s Non-Support Makes Crawford’s Future Dubious” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 June 1931.

¹²⁹ “Westerners To Test Grays Strength At Forbes Field Friday” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930.

¹³⁰ Ribowsky, *Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 163; Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 68-72. The downside of night baseball was that the lighting systems often made it difficult for the players to see the ball and hence, the game was more dangerous. “Westerners To Test Grays Strength At Forbes Field Friday” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930; Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 144-145; Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 71.

¹³¹ Abe Manley, owner of the Brooklyn Eagles, negotiated with the owners of Ebbets Field the installation of a lighting system in 1935. Irvin N. Rosee, “Brooklyn’s Colored League Entry May Influence Dodgers to Play Night Baseball in 1936” *Brooklyn Times Union*, 16 January 1935.

Leagues, under Wilkinson and Greenlee, found a unique way to cater to their particular clientele and make their games accessible for larger portions of the black population. This move not only allowed Greenlee to attract a greater number of fans to the park, but also highlighted the technological advances of black baseball in contrast with the major leagues.¹³²

Greenlee brought more than just black baseball to the field. In order to attract additional fans and revenue, he booked boxing matches at Greenlee Field to fill the open dates when the Crawfords were on the road.¹³³ For boxing enthusiasts in Pittsburgh, and particularly in the Hill district, Greenlee's willingness to host prizefighting bouts was a significant advantage of the new construction. Moreover, the black press and black boxing fans saw the potential for Greenlee to promote and encourage up and coming black boxers, by giving them "more consideration in the new arena than at any other place in the district."¹³⁴ As such, local African Americans hoped Greenlee Field would succeed as a race enterprise that benefited black athletes and black Pittsburgh.

¹³² "Westerners To Test Grays Strength At Forbes Field Friday" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 July 1930. White baseball would not employ lights until 1935. Ribowsky, *Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 146 and White, *Creating the National Pastime*, 176. Brooklyn Dodger officials first installed lights for their Sunday rental of Ebbets Field to the Brooklyn Eagles. A Brooklyn sportswriter suggested that the Dodgers might adopt night games after a successful season of Negro League night baseball. Rosee, "Brooklyn's Colored League Entry" *Brooklyn Times Union*, 16 January 1935. On the history of night baseball, see David Pietrusza, *Lights On! The Wild Century-Long Saga of Night Baseball* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1997).

¹³³ Lonnie Harrington, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 May 1932; "Chocolate May Fight in New Greenlee Field," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 May 1932.

¹³⁴ Chester L. Washington, "Sportively Speaking," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 May 1932.

The opening of Greenlee Field underscored the importance of the field to Negro League Baseball. A number of local politicians and sportswriters attended the opening ceremony.¹³⁵ Greenlee himself took advantage of the occasion to make a spectacular entrance “in a red convertible.” “Surrounded by a marching band, he received a standing ovation from the capacity crowd of six thousand. Clad in a white silk suit and tie, Gus walked to the pitching mound and threw out the first pitch.”¹³⁶ The theatrics surrounding the opening of Greenlee Field provided great entertainment for baseball fans as well as a chance to celebrate the achievements of black baseball in the face of tremendous obstacles, most notably the Great Depression.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* glowingly reported about the new ballpark, lauding its many advantages.

Pittsburgh has a new ball park, erected by a Negro, for Negroes, and with Negroes as participating factors. It is one of the finest independent ball parks in the country. With a left field longer than that at Forbes Field, with a right field which has yet to succumb to a home run wallop and with a seating capacity of close to 7,000 people, it stands as a monument of progress.¹³⁷

For the *Courier* and Pittsburgh baseball fans, Greenlee’s dedication to building a local black business was as significant as his ability to put together a competitive team. As such, Greenlee was to be applauded and admired. In 1933, the *Courier* championed Greenlee as president of the Negro National League, noting that “no man in the country is more interested in the progress of Negro baseball, and certainly none will spend as much

¹³⁵ “Expect Record Crowd At Park,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 April 1932.

¹³⁶ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 163.

¹³⁷ William C. Nunn, “Rowdyism in Baseball” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 May 1932.

money as the Pittsburgh sportsman to put it across.”¹³⁸ Despite the ample praise, Greenlee’s motives were not entirely selfless. Although undoubtedly interested in the success of the Negro National League, Greenlee sought profit and championships from his baseball club above all else.

The symbolic importance of Greenlee Field was equally apparent in its grand opening as it was in its premature closing. In 1938, after a series of disastrous on and off the field events, Greenlee closed his beloved field.¹³⁹ Greenlee’s supporters in his venture to build a black-owned Negro League park quickly became loud opponents. Members of the black press argued that Greenlee’s failure to thrive merely reinforced the worst stereotypes about black baseball and black business in general. *Pittsburgh Courier* sportswriter John Clark implicitly accused Greenlee of failing the African American race by not assuming a “purer racial interest” in his baseball operations, thus linking the fate of black baseball with the larger issues of racial progress.¹⁴⁰ Clark attributed the failure of Greenlee Field not to the internal power dynamics of Negro League baseball or Satchel Paige’s defection from the team, but instead to Greenlee’s decision to employ whites at

¹³⁸ “Greenlee Should Make Good President” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 March 1933.

¹³⁹ Greenlee and Posey’s fight for power over Pittsburgh baseball had reached a crescendo during 1937, Posey aligned himself with white booking agents in an attempt to make it difficult for Greenlee to profitably travel with his team. Satchel Paige’s defection to play for the Trujillo All Stars in 1937 only exacerbated Greenlee’s troubles. Mark Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 158, 162-163, 173-175.

¹⁴⁰ Clark went on to say that the closing of Greenlee Park sent the message to the rest of the country that “Pittsburgh is no place to attempt big things for Negroes.” Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 174.

the park in greater numbers than blacks.¹⁴¹ The economic demands and high unemployment of the Great Depression made Greenlee's hiring practice all the more distasteful to his black clientele. Fans responded by staying home and spending their money elsewhere. If Greenlee had considered racial pride in his employment practices and staffed his park with African American workers, Clark implied, black fans would become enthusiastic patrons in order to support such a race-based initiative. According to this contemporary interpretation, successful black baseball magnates had to consider baseball as part of a larger crusade for racial success and civil rights. Failure to do so would not only result in the failure of the club but also in a setback for the race.

The sensitive issue of the ownership of leisure spaces plagued black ball players throughout the existence of the Negro Leagues. The symbolic importance of this issue became intertwined with one of the derogatory terms opponents of integration used to describe professional black ball players, "sandlotters." "Sandlot" baseball was not an insulting term in and of itself; members of the black press used "sandlot" team as shorthand for semi-professional or amateur baseball clubs, thus contrasting sandlot teams with the professional Negro League teams.¹⁴² White reporters and major league baseball officials, however, often employed the term sandlotter in a more pejorative manner. By dubbing the black leagues "sandlots," these observers negatively compared the white and Negro Leagues by highlighting the widespread lack of physical home fields in black professional baseball. Consequently, the term implied that the black leagues operated at

¹⁴¹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 226. The *Courier* had previously praised Greenlee for his hiring of a black umpire at Greenlee Field. "Crawfords to Use At Least 1 Negro Umpire at New Uptown Park" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 February 1932.

¹⁴² W. Rollo Wilson, "Sports Shots," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 February 1932.

a lower level than the major leagues. As “sandlotters,” Negro League players presumably lacked both athletic ability and professionalism.¹⁴³ Indeed, the derogatory term reinforced the common perception that black baseball players were sideshow performers rather than athletes.

William “Sug” Cornelius noted in an oral interview that major league commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis used the term when he prohibited white players from competing against black teams in barnstorming tours. According to Cornelius, after a white all-star team lost to Satchel Paige’s black team, Landis “said they [the white all-stars] were a disgrace to organized baseball to let a bunch of sandlotters beat them.”¹⁴⁴ Cornelius noted, however, “we were a bunch of *good* sandlotters.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Negro League players also used the term “sandlot baseball” to refer to semiprofessional leagues, both black and white. For these players, there was an important distinction to be made between semipro baseball and the professional and organized Negro Leagues. Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 17. In an article on Michael Jordan, John Edgar Wideman described a similar phenomenon in late twentieth-century basketball. Wideman and Jordan reflect on the ways in which basketball coaches (presumably white coaches considering the dearth of African American coaches in college and professional basketball, particularly prior to 1990 when Wideman first published his piece) criticized black players for “playground moves.” As Wideman notes, that designation “meant there was something wrong with it, which also meant in a funny way there was something wrong with the playground, and since the playground was a black world, there was something wrong with you, a black player out there doing something your way rather than their way.” John Edgar Wideman, “Michael Jordan Leaps the Great Divide” (*Esquire*, 1990) reprinted in Gena Dagel Caponi, ed., *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, & Slam Dunking* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 396.

¹⁴⁴ William “Sug” Cornelius, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 237.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

Negro League players resented the term “sandlotters” and the implications that they participated in second-rate baseball because of the arbitrary color line drawn by white baseball officials. Cool Papa Bell attributed the use of the term “sandlotters” to a greater plan on the part of white Americans to keep “the black hidden, not only in baseball, in any form of life that we had outstanding black people.”¹⁴⁶ By rejecting this term and others that identified black ball as a less than worthy alternative to white baseball, Negro League players and owners pushed for public recognition for their sporting achievements.

Even with the end of the segregated era of baseball, “sandlotter” continued to persist as a derogatory term leveled at African American ball players. Larry Doby, a former Negro Leaguer who played with the Cleveland Indians after Jackie Robinson broke the color line, encountered the term during his first season in the majors. Critics referred to Doby as a “sandlot performer,” emphasizing both his perceived athletic shortcomings and his background in the Negro Leagues.¹⁴⁷ As African Americans entered the era of integrated baseball, they still had to counter the major league perception that they were less adequate because of their color and their time in the Negro Leagues.

African American baseball players also had to contend with the vagaries of Jim Crow travel. Like African American musicians and actors, black baseball players traversed both the North and the South. Consequently, they encountered regionally-specific types of segregation. Black ballplayers were uniquely qualified to speak to the

¹⁴⁶ Bell, interview, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 216.

ambiguity of racial practices as well as to promote successful strategies for dealing with Jim Crow.

Travel, especially interstate travel, was a significant site of contention in segregated America. Public transportation was often segregated, either by law or tradition. Similarly, hotels and restaurants operated under codes of segregation, particularly in the South. Travel across and around racial boundaries could be a dangerous undertaking for early twentieth century African Americans. Thus, the black press devoted a great deal of coverage to Negro League travel. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the *Defender* and the *Courier* published detailed accounts of spring training trips to destinations in Texas and Louisiana.¹⁴⁸

In Jim Crow America, securing safe and reliable transportation was a crucial racial and political issue.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, freedom to travel was culturally significant for African Americans. As Angela Y. Davis has noted: “for people of African descent who were emerging from a long history of enslavement and oppression during the late

¹⁴⁸ “The Chicago Giants Baseball Club” *Chicago Defender*, 22 January 1910, 1; “The Leland Chicago Giants” *Chicago Defender*, 16 April 1910, 1; John L. Clark, “I Believe You Should Know: Following the Crawfords” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 April 1932; “Houston to Oppose Local Team Next Week” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 April 1932; John L. Clark, “I Believe You Should Know” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 April 1932. See also Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 157. Despite the long (and documented) history of black spring training, a *Saturday Evening Post* writer contended that black teams had more recently adopted the practice in order to “ape[d] their white peers.” Ted Shane, “The Chocolate Rube Waddell,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 27, 1940, 20.

¹⁴⁹ On travel of prosperous blacks during this time period, see Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow,’” 130-149. Sherrie Tucker examines the travel of all-black girl bands in *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 135-226.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexuality and travel provided the most tangible evidence of freedom.”¹⁵⁰ Even as African Americans exercised this new freedom, segregation placed increasing limitations on how blacks could travel in the United States. Racial tensions and ambiguous racial policies also brought increasing danger for those who traveled without local knowledge of racial customs.¹⁵¹ Frazier “Slow” Robinson recalled the inherent difficulties in negotiating through the United States:

The hardest part about my time with the Blackballers was being away from home and facing strange racial situations. In Okmulgee, I knew where I could and couldn’t go. The high school was segregated, but the movie theater wasn’t. That sort of thing. It never made sense to me why I could sit next to the white kids in a movie theater but not in a classroom, but that’s the way it was. On the road with Tulsa in 1927 and 1928, I never knew what to expect.¹⁵²

For Robinson as well as ordinary black folks, travel under Jim Crow was complex. Travel became both a way to assert one’s freedom and a test of one’s ability to safely navigate American racism.

Negro League players and teams struggled with transporting themselves through the country during their barnstorming tours. These tours involved constant travel, with stops in a different town or city each night, when stops were possible. For black baseball teams, segregated railroads and buses limited their options for getting from one place to

¹⁵⁰ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Random House, 1998; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 67. Davis analyzes the importance of travel themes in black women’s blues music in the 1920s. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 66-90. Similarly, Lawrence Levine documents an emphasis on mobility in his study of the blues and black culture. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 261-267.

¹⁵¹ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 130-131.

¹⁵² Robinson, *Catching Dreams*, 9.

another with ease and comfort. Instead, team owners had to arrange for transportation that would be both safe and cost-efficient for the club.

Black fans and sportswriters were acutely aware of the inherent difficulties faced by Negro Leaguers in their attempt to play their scheduled games. The *Defender* highlighted not just the results of Negro League games but also how the team traveled and how they were treated on the road. As the Chicago Giants began a road trip through the South, the *Defender* noted that team officials had provided for the team's security and well being by arranging for a private Pullman car for the duration of the trip. Moreover, the article pointed out that having the Pullman car would ensure "that they may have nothing but the best comforts."¹⁵³

Similarly, the *Pittsburgh Courier* printed weekly reports on the 1932 Crawfords spring training and exhibition tour through the southern states. These reports highlighted the exuberant reception the teams received from southern black fans while carefully avoiding mention of any difficulties encountered by the clubs. The *Courier* accounts even applauded the status of black-white race relations in cities like New Orleans and Monroe, Louisiana, noting that in Houston "Negroes are employed as detectives. Taxi lines and service stations are operated by members of our race."¹⁵⁴ The report from

¹⁵³ "The Chicago Giants Baseball Club" *Chicago Defender*, 22 January 1910, p. 1: "The Leland Chicago Giants" *Chicago Defender*, 16 April 1910, 1. In *Swing Shift*, Sherrie Tucker notes that protected transportation was crucial to the very existence of black all-girl bands traveling through the South. In one instance, a female musician claimed that the loss of "their private Pullman-type sleeper bus" contributed to the dissolution of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 67.

¹⁵⁴ John L. Clark, "I Believe You Should Know," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 April 1932. For press coverage of spring training trips through the south, see also, "Rube Foster's Bunch Bound for Chicago" *Chicago*

Monroe did hint at potential problems, but quickly glossed over them in order to present a more pleasant picture. "Although a visitor to Monroe might say that no compliment should be passed on to the way Negroes are huddled together, they seem to get along alright, and enjoy themselves."¹⁵⁵ By underplaying the racial tensions in the South, the black press and its readership could construct a narrative in which black performers were not subject to the indignities of Jim Crow travel.

In one respect, the Crawfords were shielded from some of the less pleasant aspects of travel through the 1930s South. The Crawfords and Greenlee traversed the country in a new team bus, emblazoned "Pittsburgh Crawfords, World Colored Champions."¹⁵⁶ Although less than subtle, the bus served two purposes for Greenlee and his team. First, it provided Crawford players with a safe means of transportation, limiting their interactions with segregation. Second, it demonstrated the wealth and pride of the Crawfords, in a manner that meant both to intimidate opposition teams and to inspire black fans. The Crawfords extended the importance of their bus by advertising Greenlee field on the vehicle's body. In one picture or viewing, a fan could immediately link the

Defender, 9 April 1921; "Enjoying the Southern Sun" *Chicago Defender*, 2 April 1932; "Jim Brown Has Outfit in the Land of Dixie" *Chicago Defender*, 2 April 1932; "Cleveland Plans to Train in South" *Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1934; "Kansas City Monarchs Leave to Start Drills in South" *Chicago Defender*, 21 April 1934. All-girl bands also traveled by private buses in some instances. Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 138-139.

¹⁵⁵ John L. Clark, "I Believe You Should Know," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 April 1932.

¹⁵⁶ Initially, Greenlee purchased two "seven passenger Lincolns for the team," before moving up to obtain a team bus. Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 16; O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 47. O'Neil described the bus as "big and luxurious."

Crawford's independent transportation with their renowned and black-owned baseball park (Figure 1.3). Through this bus, the Crawfords were able to subvert at least one of the most visible forms of segregation and discrimination in twentieth century America.

Similarly, the Newark Eagles maintained a team bus in the late 1930s and 1940s, traveling the country in a large vehicle that prominently featured the team name on the side of the bus. (Figure 1.4) Other Negro League teams, aware of the prestige inherent in club-owned transportation, highlighted their own vehicles in posters and flyers. The Washington Philadelphia Pilots, a barnstorming team, compiled a poster that prominently mentioned that the team would be "traveling in their own bus with a great aggregation of base-ballers."¹⁵⁷ In the case of the Stars, who were attempting to interest booking agents in addition to fans, the importance of having independent transportation was immense. Booking agents felt that teams who could control their methods of travel had a much greater chance of successfully meeting all barnstorming commitments.

Similarly, the Kansas City Monarchs utilized buses in order to circumvent both segregated transportation and lodging while on the road. Under owner J.L. Wilkinson, the Monarchs traveled around the country on a bus with two trailers. Wilkinson could thus access towns too small to have a railroad station and take advantage of untapped markets. Moreover, the Monarchs employed the trailers as lodging for players in towns where it was impossible for black men to rent a hotel room. One of the trailers also had dining facilities, eliminating the need to find food in areas of the country where businesses often refused service to African

¹⁵⁷ Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White*, 69.

Figure 1. 3: Pittsburgh Crawfords' team and bus.

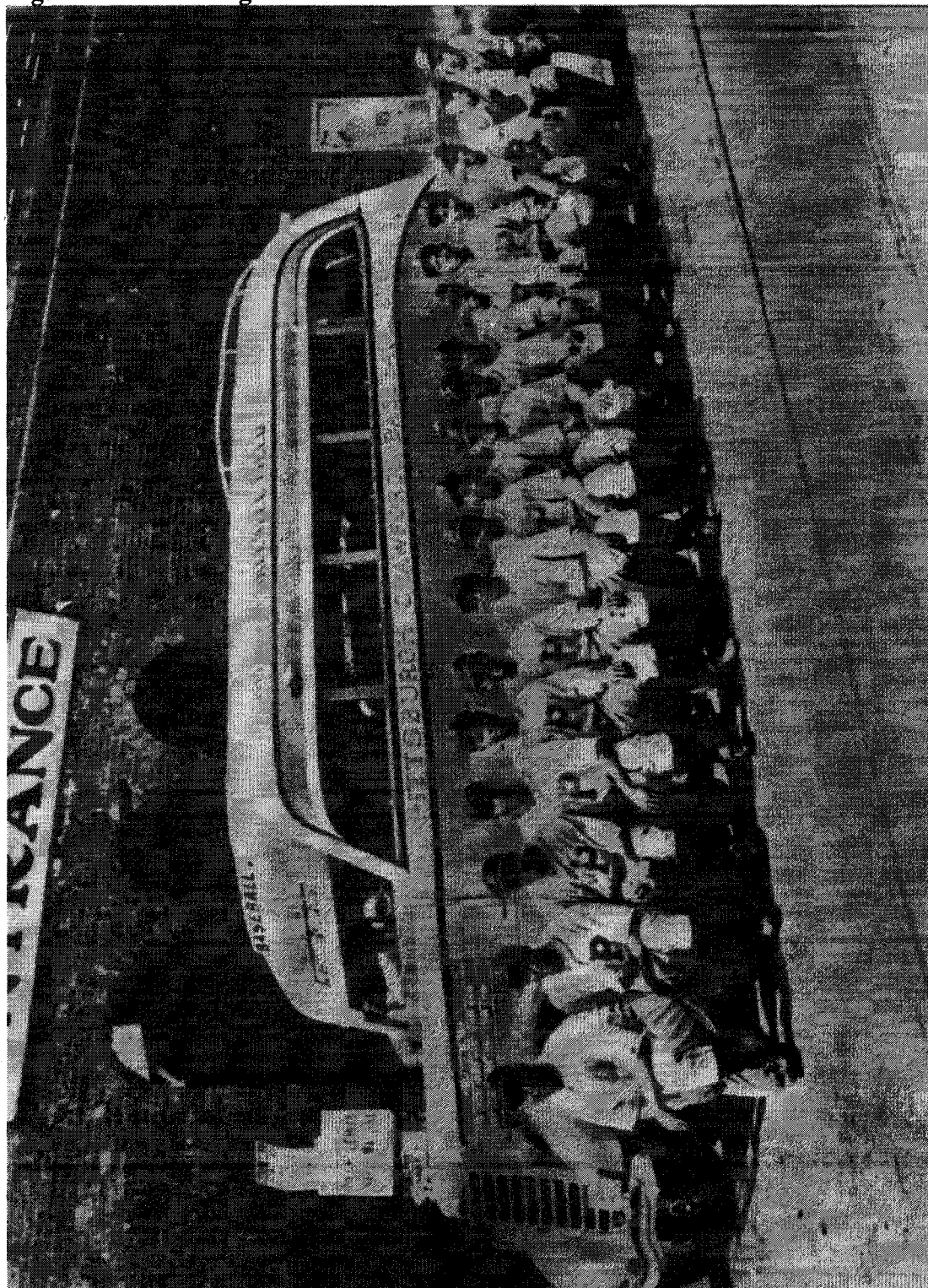
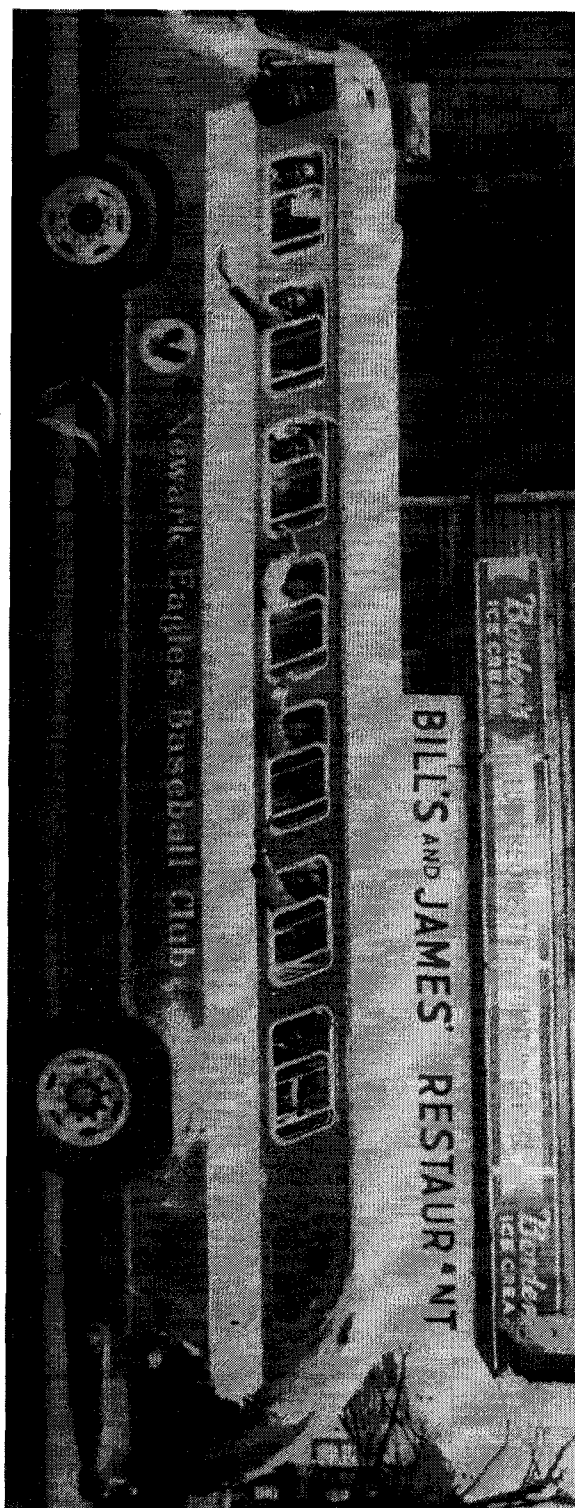


Figure 1. 4: Newark Eagles Team Bus



Americans.¹⁵⁸ In their bus, the Monarchs were slightly insulated from the problems inherent in traveling through Jim Crow America.

For fans of the Monarchs and other Negro League teams, these buses symbolized an effective strategy against segregation and discrimination as well as an effective advertisement. Even if they themselves could not utilize similar strategies in order to escape the difficulties of racism while traveling, they could appreciate the potential indignities that made bus travel so attractive for black baseball players. Much as Negro League fans applauded the construction of black-owned ballparks and lighting systems, transportation that subverted Jim Crow represented a small victory against racial injustice. Thus, as Negro League owners alerted potential customers to their presence, they also traded on the positive political implications of transportation ownership.

Other teams, lacking the financial resources of Greenlee and the Crawfords, relied on less reliable and much less comfortable forms of transportation. In his memoir, Buck O'Neil, Negro League first baseman, recalled an instance when all eleven teammates had to share one car in order to get to their next game.¹⁵⁹ Other players had similar

¹⁵⁸ O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 83; Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 61, 78. During World War II, the black all-female swing band, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm employed a similar bus "equipped with eating and sleeping facilities to temper the risks of traveling through Jim Crow territory." For bands like the International Sweethearts, which were often covertly integrated, private transportation also ameliorated the stresses inherent in their attempt to protect "passing" band members. Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 67.

¹⁵⁹ O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 51.

recollections of crammed automobiles and long dangerous drives between ball games.¹⁶⁰ When even cars were not an option, players “hopped freight train[s]” to keep up with the demanding schedule.¹⁶¹ Buck Leonard recalled an instance when his team was forced to sleep in the baggage car of a train because of overcrowding and an unsympathetic conductor.¹⁶²

Unsurprisingly, Satchel Paige employed a means of transportation that circumvented almost all of the difficulties of segregation and reinforced public perception of Paige as a trickster.¹⁶³ Paige turned away from team buses and Pullman cars in favor of using airplanes in order to travel to games. Although Paige by all accounts was wary of air travel, the status gained from an airplane dedicated to his use was too good to pass up. To be traveling during the Great Depression on an airplane rather than on a team bus reflected Paige’s determination to prove his financial and athletic status to all observers and once again, applied greater pressure to white baseball to acknowledge and include black ball players. The photographs of Paige and his airplane signified to the black

¹⁶⁰ Page, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 151-152; Leonard, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 255-256. William Brashler provides a fictionalized version of these very common Negro League stories in *Bingo Long*.

¹⁶¹ O’Neil, *I Was Right On Time*, 55. Othello Renfroe “hoboed” to join a team in Chicago. Othello Renfroe, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 342.

¹⁶² Leonard, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 259.

¹⁶³ Paige’s role as trickster will be examined further in Chapter Four.

Figure 1.3: Satchel Paige's All-Stars and Plane



community Paige's ability to circumvent and literally rise above the limitations of Jim Crow (Figure 1.5).¹⁶⁴

Finding lodging and food was extraordinarily difficult during barnstorming tours. Players recalled long bus stretches, from Chicago to Cleveland, during which they were unable to stop because of Jim Crow policies.¹⁶⁵ With difficult economic times of the Depression, teams like the Monarchs could no longer afford Pullman cars or private trailer buses. Without a means of portable lodging comparable to that of a Pullman, the team "relied on a loose network of black boardinghouses and private homes on their rounds."¹⁶⁶

This experience of finding informal lodging on the road was quite common in the Negro Leagues.¹⁶⁷ "Wild Bill" Wright described the usual options as nothing less than a constant struggle: "In small towns there weren't any black hotels and you had to either sleep in the bus or someone would take you to their home."¹⁶⁸ When they were unable to secure this type of lodging, players made due by erecting makeshift campsites

¹⁶⁴ In 1946, the *New York Times* ran a small article that highlighted Paige's unique manner of transportation. "Travels by Own Plane" *New York Times*, 9 July 1946.

¹⁶⁵ Marshall, interview by Banker, *Black Diamonds*; Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 154-155; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 126.

¹⁶⁶ Ribowsky, *Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 143-144; Earl Wilson, Sr., interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 29; Buster Haywood, interview by Kelley, 110-111.

¹⁶⁷ "Sometimes we'd stay in hotels that had so many bedbugs you had to put a newspaper down between the mattress and the sheets. Other times we'd rent rooms in a YMCA, or we'd go to a hotel and rent three rooms. That way you got use of the bath...All those players would change clothes in those three rooms, go to the ball park and play a double header." Leonard, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 259.

near their destination, at times, “even on the ball field on which they would play the next day.”¹⁶⁹

For the local black fans, the uncertain accommodations of the barnstormers had important implications. Although many black fans viewed the traveling players as superstar athletes, they witnessed the indignities of travel for African Americans regardless of status. For ordinary black folks, the sight of well-known baseball players forced to erect temporary tent lodging in fields because of a lack of accommodation underscored the power segregation in the United States. No exceptions were made for black baseball players, musicians, or boxers. Thus, African Americans closely identified with the plight of the traveling performers and united against the unfairness of Jim Crow. Within this context, those who could somehow circumvent segregation and discrimination were greatly admired.

Memphis Red Sox outfielder Cowan “Bubba” Hyde recalled “a lot of places we were turned down” when asking to purchase food, consequently, “we would make

¹⁶⁸ Burnis “Wild Bill” Wright, interview by Kelley, *Voices From the Negro Leagues*, 37. Black theater groups had similarly limited accommodation options during their tours. An all-black cast of *Macbeth*, “slept at the YMCA, at churches, at schools and in private homes. There were a few boarding houses, and some ‘fourth-rate flea bag [hotels].” Glenda E. Gill, *White Grease Paint on Black Performers: A Study of the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 17. According to Sherrie Tucker, black “all girl” bands relied on similar networks of informal lodging through friendly locals. Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 139. For Tucker’s all-girl bands, the situation was made even more difficult by the fact that many bands included white women passing as black. Thus, they faced a great deal of potential danger if their integrated status had been discovered while they traveled in the south. Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 135-162.

¹⁶⁹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 144.

it our business to not stop.”¹⁷⁰ Some teams relied on their light-skinned players to procure food for the entire team.¹⁷¹ Buck Leonard recalled this practice as commonplace. “Most teams had a player who could pass for white and could go into restaurants and buys sandwiches for the rest of the team.”¹⁷² In some instances, Negro League teams took advantage of the fact that non-native English speakers could circumvent the color line. Latino players at times were served in establishments that refused African American patrons.¹⁷³ Leonard and his Homestead Gray teammates observed this exception to the color line during a barnstorming tour.

One time, Luis Marquez, who was about my color, said he was hungry and that he was going to go in a white restaurant and get something to eat. We all laughed and walked on down the block, waiting for him to get put out. After a little while, we went back down to the corner and looked in through the window, and he was in there eating. When he came out, we all gave him our orders for him to get us some sandwiches, too. He could do that just because he spoke Spanish, and we couldn't go in there.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Cowan “Bubba” Hyde, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 10. See also, William “Bobby” Robinson, interview by Brent Kelley, *The Negro Leagues Revisited*, 5.

¹⁷¹ Robinson, *Catching Dreams*, 62; O’Neil, *I was Right on Time*, 87; Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White*, 78.

¹⁷² Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 127.

¹⁷³ Tucker describes how Duke Pilgrim, manager of a black “all-girls” band in the 1940s was similarly able to circumvent the color line. Pilgrim was light skinned and “had straight hair.” As such, he would pass for white when necessary to avert “potential troubles on the road.” Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 160-161.

¹⁷⁴ Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 127. This ambiguity of the American color line created difficulties for Latino players attempting to adjust to life and racial policies in the United States. See Burgos, Jr., “Playing Ball in a Black and White Field of Dreams,” 67-104. Such actions could be dangerous. If a business owner realized that a player was part of a black team, the owner could react violently, feeling he had been fooled. Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 131.

Other teams did their best to negotiate within a Jim Crow system that employed threats and overcharges in order to discourage black patronage by relying on informal information networks to avoid hostile businesses and to patronize those willing to bend Jim Crow policies.¹⁷⁵

For African Americans, the ownership of and access to leisure space was immensely important. As the Great Depression diminished their opportunities to work and obtain an income, issues of racial pride and black enterprise became increasingly important to black baseball stakeholders. Thus, African Americans supported and encouraged baseball ventures that not only provided a social outlet and diversion, but also that reflected their racial politics. In addition, African American players and fans grappled with the very real difficulties of negotiating the physical space of the United States. Reliant on road trips and barnstorming tours for their financial wellbeing, Negro League players encountered and confronted the local ambiguities and difficulties of Jim Crow while traveling through the southern, northern, and western United States.

In the first half of the twentieth century, black baseball fans, players, writers, and owners negotiated the issues of physical space within a segregated sport and country. Yet, ballparks, trains, and diners were not the only problematic sites within segregated baseball. The black Negro League athletes, their bodies and their behaviors, were the subject of public debate and concern during the first half of the twentieth century. As black baseball became more prominent and profitable, African American reformers, leaders, sportswriters, and fans developed a number of expectations for the public comportment of black baseball players.

¹⁷⁵ Cornelius, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 244.

CHAPTER TWO

“A Man and a Gentleman in Every Respect:” Negotiating Black Manhood and Respectability in a Segregated Sport¹

In 1926, Langston Hughes composed an article for *The Nation* in which he reflected on class divisions among African Americans. Hughes was particularly concerned with the denigration of “folk” cultural productions: jazz, spirituals, and dialect poems. Hughes observed two types of people the “ ‘high-class’ Negro” and the “low-down folks.” The “high-class” people came from the economic “middle class: people who are by no means rich yet never uncomfortable nor hungry.” In contrast, the “low-down folks” were

the majority...who have their nip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community...or too learned to watch the lazy world go round...they do not particularly care whether they are like white folks or anybody else. Their joy runs, bang!, into ecstasy....They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations.²

A year earlier, a sportswriter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* had bemoaned the lack of colorful players within organized black baseball. At the time, “Colorful Ball Players

¹ Judy Johnson, interview by Stephen Banker, *Black Diamonds*, Cassette Tape #1, Side Two.

² Langston Hughes “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” (June 23 1926 *The Nation*) reprinted in Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 92-97, quotes 93, 94, 96.

[were] scarce... A few years back all clubs had one or more players in their lineups who were box office attractions.” The writer identified an exception, Oscar Charleston, and posited that Turkey Stearnes could become a colorful player “with just a little more polish.”³

African American ballplayers faced new expectations following World War I. Thanks in part to Jack Johnson’s influence (both positive and negative), black athletes’ public performance of manhood had become a political and cultural concern for many African Americans. At the same time, the emergence of the New Negro, as personified and illuminated by Harlem Renaissance writers and artists, provided black baseball players with a new model of modern manhood.

In *Manning the Race*, Marlon Ross has distilled the three key components of the New Negro’s manhood: “clean living and Yankee Christian temperance in the Bookerite mold are bonded to physical duration and mental cunning from the folk mass, then the two together are enhanced by Du Boisian and Lockean concentration on arrogant mastery of the highest classics of European learning.”⁴ During the interwar period, black baseball players tried to construct their manhood in a manner consistent with the first two aspects of New Negro manhood. Although black sportswriters trumpeted the academic accomplishments of black athletes when appropriate, the learnedness of the New Negro was not a central concern for black baseball players. Instead, players completed the triad of New Negro manhood by establishing their skill and athletic prowess on the field.

³ “Rumors and Facts” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 March 1925, 7.

⁴ Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University, 2004), 98-99.

The *Courier* writer's call for "colorful players" emphasized two of the three aspects of contemporary manhood. The desire for colorful players spoke to the need for men who exhibited "folk" tendencies, i.e. Hughes's "individuality." Displays of such "colorfulness" improved attendance at games and distinguished black baseball from its white counterpart. On the other hand, "colorfulness" without skill was insufficient, according to the writer. Singling out Turkey Stearnes, he noted that Stearnes could only serve as a truly colorful player if (and only if) he performed with skill on the field.⁵

In this chapter, I will examine the multiple ways in which black baseball players negotiated their public manhood in light of shifting expectations and the continued pressures of Jim Crow.⁶ First, I will briefly discuss the transitional notions of manliness within black baseball. As performed by early Negro League stars such as Rube Foster and "Gentleman" Dave Malarcher, this earlier conception of manhood rested upon notions of racial uplift, respectability, and accommodation.⁷ Yet, it was increasingly

⁵ It is this desire for both skill and "colorful" entertainment that both allows clowning teams to thrive during the period and that also leads to its public disavowal by a number of black baseball players and advocates. Teams that clowned for the sake of clowning were frequently denounced as damaging to the race. Clowning teams will be discussed in great detail in Chapter Three.

⁷ On race and respectability in sport, see Gwendolyn Captain, "Enter Ladies and Gentlemen of Color: Gender, Sport, and the Ideal of African American Manhood and Womanhood During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century" *Journal of Sport History* 18 (Spring 1991): 81-102; Patrick B. Miller, "To 'Bring the Race Along Rapidly': Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years." *History of Education Quarterly* 35 (Summer 1995): 111-133. On respectability in African American life, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North

challenged by the ascent of a New Negro sensibility. The politicization of African Americans that accompanied World War I and the Great Migration provided an ideal setting for the transformation of black manhood.⁸ Consequently, I will then turn to the

Carolina Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 20-21, 25-31; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 68-86.

⁸ In this chapter, I use "manhood," "manliness," and "masculinity" in three distinct ways. "Manhood" denotes the general category of male-gendered characteristics and performance. In contrast, "manliness" and "masculinity" both reference specific, historical conceptions of manhood. As delineated by Gail Bederman, "manliness" refers to the Victorian ideal of gentlemanly comportment and was the dominant ideal from the 1880s until the turn of the century. Manly men represented the pinnacle of white manhood, they were self-controlled, morally upright, and of exceptional character. "Masculinity," in contrast, developed as a desirable characteristic male power and encompassed aggressiveness, physical force, and more explicit sexuality. These two competing ideals functioned in relation to each other. The development of a "masculinity" ideal did not mean the wholesale abandonment of "manliness." In a way, "masculinity" built upon the belief that white men had already proved their "manliness," and thus could assert their manhood in more explicit and aggressive ways. According to Bederman, by the 1910s, men were defining masculinity as the primitive lusts and passions of their primordial ancestors. But they did this with the belief that white male Americans had already reached the apex of civilization, and they were merely reinvigorating their prowess through an infusion of savagery. These notions of manhood were explicitly and implicitly raced and classed. African Americans and members of the working class, regardless of race, were excluded from the ideals of both "manliness" and "masculinity." This unstated exclusion did not prevent African Americans from promoting the attainment of these ideals as a prerequisite for racial and social equality. Both manliness and masculinity acquired a distinctly racialized meaning when performed by African Americans. In particular, adherents of a Washington philosophy of accommodation and

performance of black masculinity during the interwar period. In this section, I will analyze newspaper accounts and oral interviews in order to uncover public displays and critiques of black masculinity. In particular, I will try to address the question of how African American baseball players met, or at times rejected, the demands of New Negro manhood.⁹ Through their on-the-field performance of stylized baseball and their

respectability championed manliness as an important goal for African American men. New Negro masculinity built upon black manliness (and gentlemanliness) but allowed for a more explicit expression of physical prowess. Moreover, the New Negro man contested the color line whenever possible, performing what Ross has called the “cool pose of racial trespassing.” See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-32; Ross, *Manning the Race*, 90-144.

⁹ On New Negro Manhood, see Ross, *Manning the Race*. Martin Summers has written an important analysis of black middle-class manhood, especially as performed within organizations like the freemasons and the United Negro Improvement Association (Garvey’s UNIA). Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Although a number of scholars have specifically addressed the ways in which African American men (especially middle and upper class men) shaped and were shaped by conceptions of masculinity from 1880-1930, full-scale examinations of black masculinity during the Depression are scarce and usually have taken the form of individual biographies. See, for example, representative works on Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, Richard Bak, *Joe Louis, The Great Black Hope* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996, 1998); William J. Baker, *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Donald McRae, *Heroes Without A Country: America’s Betrayal of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2002); Chris Mead, *Champion- Joe Louis: Black Hero in White America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995). Similarly, more work is needed on African American working-class manhood. On the earlier period and in addition to Ross and Summers, see the following representative works: Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Earnestine Jenkins and Darlene

extracurricular public activities, black baseball players challenged the gentleman model of the African American athlete. Instead they functioned as New Negroes and, at times, as bad men.

Negro League founder Rube Foster straddled the line between the turn of the century gentleman-athlete and the burgeoning (and masculine) New Negro. In the years immediately preceding and following his founding of the Negro National League in 1920, Foster cultivated a reputation as a “gentleman” and “race man.” Both identities would prove to be advantageous for Foster, allowing him to gain the loyalty and cooperation of a supportive black press and to promote his league partially through the force of his own personality and reputation.

Foster’s ascent to black celebrity status occurred during a time when popular magazines and periodicals increasingly included sports in their pages, a trend that had begun in earnest around the turn of the century.¹⁰ Magazines such as *Harper’s*, *Munsey’s*, and *Scribner’s* dedicated pages to sport and featured baseball-themed illustrations. Similarly, black periodicals like *Half-Century* also incorporated sporting news into their publications. The illustrations used by these magazines reflected

Clark Hine, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, Volume 2: *The 19th Century: From Emancipation to Jim Crow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ For example, *Harper’s Young People* started a regular and expanded sports column in 1893. *Harper’s Round Table* instituted their sports column in 1898. Sports coverage in the *New York Times* increased significantly between 1880-1916. Jeff Nickel and Sarah Trembanis, “‘What Moves Our People To-day:’ Voter Apathy and The Rise of Sport, 1880-1916,” conference paper, presented at the Annual Meeting of the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH), Columbus, Ohio, May 2003.

contemporary conceptions of sporting manhood, both white and black; thus shaping the cultural expectations of manhood that Foster simultaneously supported and challenged.

In particular, three cover illustrations published in the 1910s illuminated the ways in which the African American and white press perpetuated an ideal manhood that incorporated baseball imagery.¹¹ In 1914, *Colliers* featured a cover image of an older man and a young boy poised at home plate. The boy, as catcher, excitedly awaited the pitch, while the man assumed a batting stance. The older man was dressed in a suit, as if he had spontaneously decided to join in the game after returning from work (Figure 2.1). This image underscored the more salient aspects of 1910s manhood, the man and boy were participating in an approved form of leisure, baseball, thus finding an outlet for their masculine energies. For the boy, in particular, such sporting activities were meant to be instructive and beneficial in shaping his manhood.¹²

Three years later, *Half-Century Magazine* printed a remarkably similar cover illustration (Figure 2.2). In *Half-Century's* version, the man was older, appearing to be more of a grandfather type than a fatherly type, and also less athletic-looking. Otherwise, the two illustrations were almost identical, down to the excited expression on the catcher's face. Both illustrations supported the contemporary notion of manhood as a product of wholesome, athletic diversion as well as the expectation. None of the key figures appeared to be overly-masculine or sexualized.

¹¹ The visual culture of black baseball will be explored in depth in Chapter Three.

¹² On Muscular Christianity and the role of athletics in shaping manhood, see the literature on the Progressive playground movements, cited in Chapter One, footnote 48.

Figure 2.1: *Collier's Magazine*, June 1914.

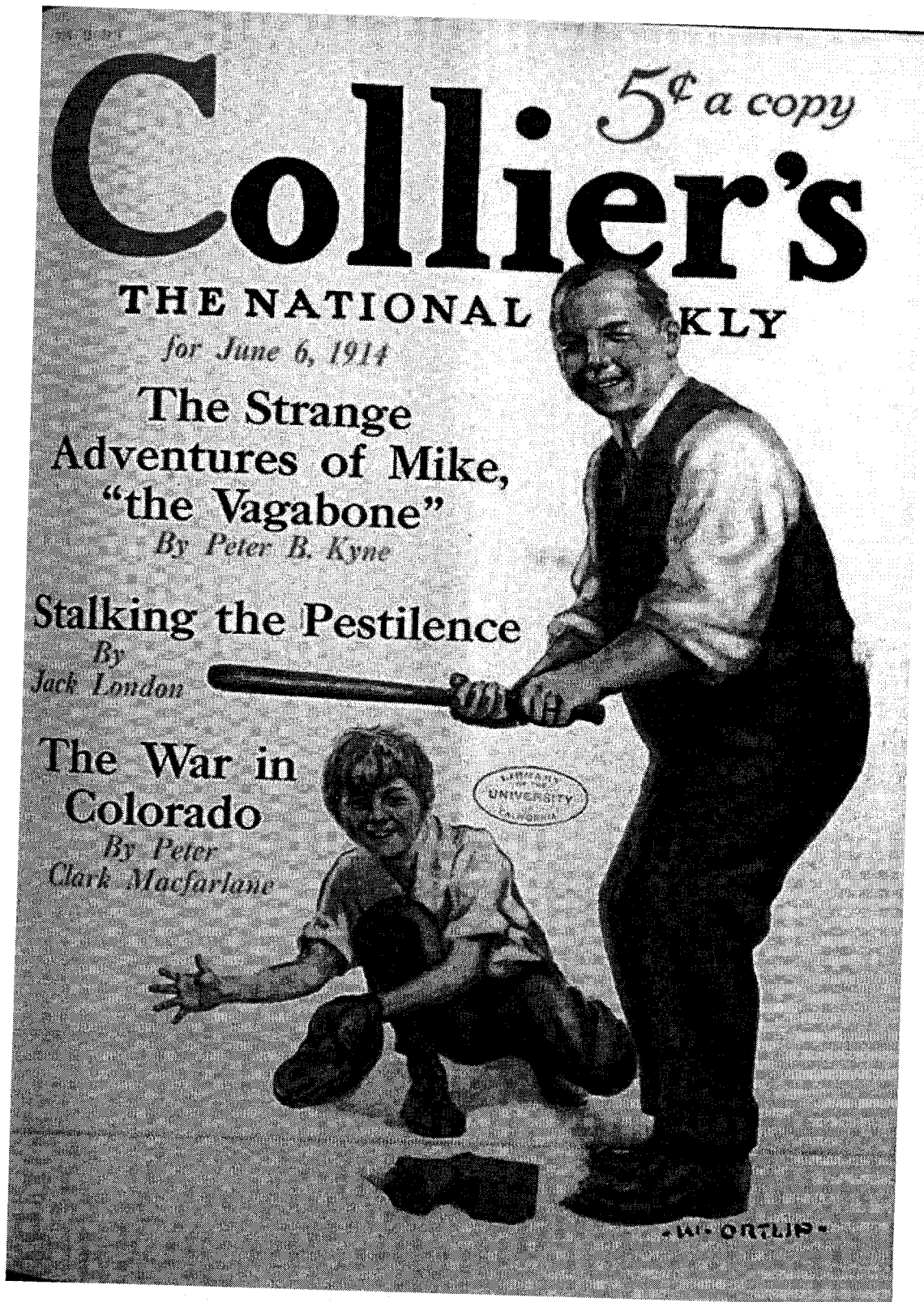


Figure 2.2: *Half-Century Magazine*, July 1917



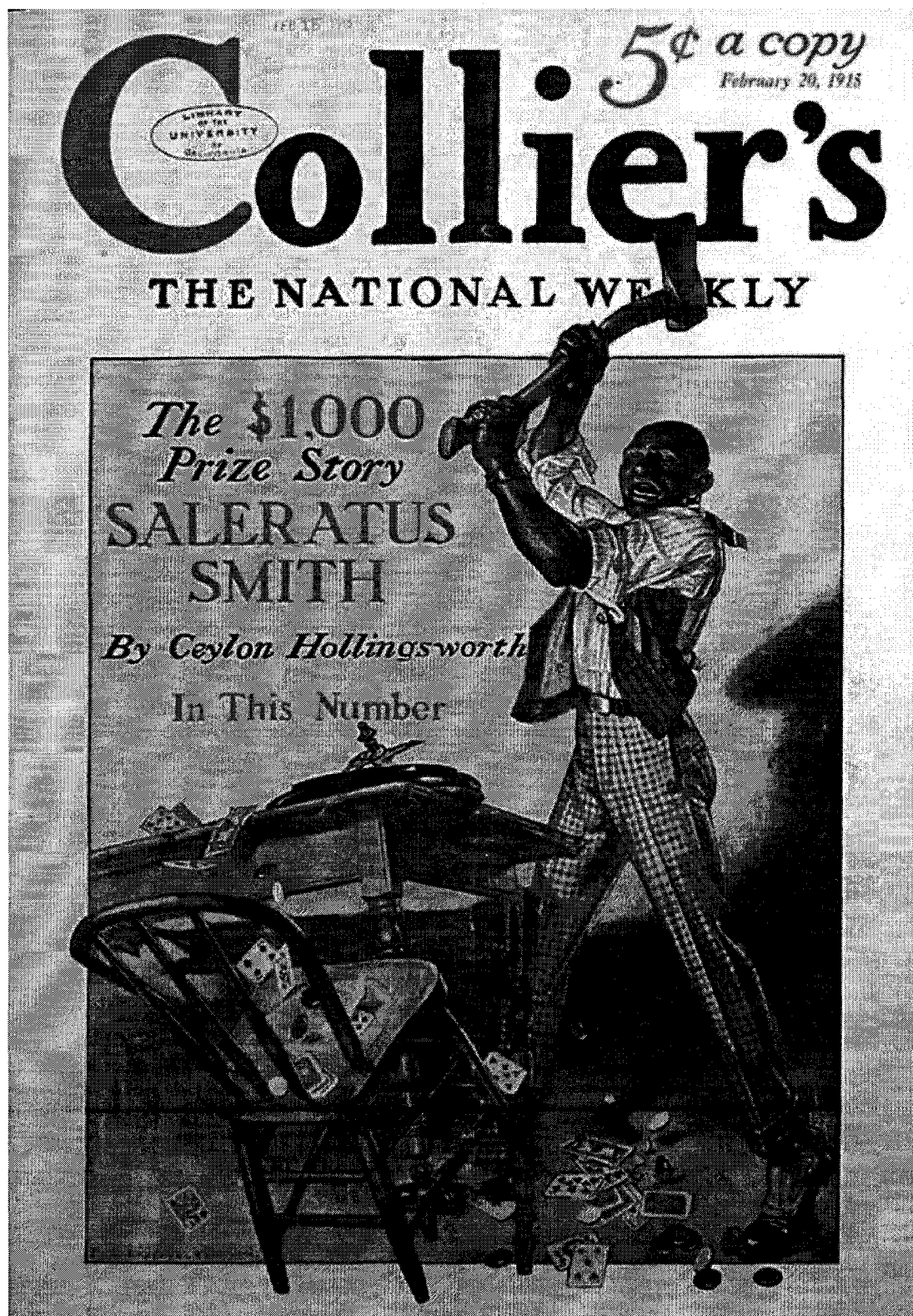
In contrast, a subsequent *Collier's* cover would reinforce the notion of the hypermasculine and potentially dangerous black man. In 1915, *Collier's* featured a drawing of an obviously enraged African American man wielding an ax (Figure 2.3). The artist placed evidence of a card-game gone awry in the foreground, thus suggesting that the man's violence stemmed from a gambling disappointment. Consequently, this image perpetuated the racial stereotype of the violent African American man. Although this image could have suggested the badmen folk heroes of African American culture, its employment by a white periodical and its lack of context created a negative image of black manhood. For Foster and his fellow ballplayers, crafting a public image in the contested terrain of racialized black manhood ideals required careful negotiation.

In the 1910s, Foster was undoubtedly the most well-known of the early twentieth-century black baseball players. As pitcher-manager of the Leland Giants in the first two decades of the century, Foster's name was synonymous with professional black baseball. Frequently, Foster was the only name mentioned in newspaper articles promoting and reporting on black baseball games. Consequently, Foster functioned as the public face and most important attendance-drawing card in early black baseball. White newspapers like the *New York Times* not only announced any local appearances of the Leland Giants but also made specific note of Foster's role in the team and in the sport.¹³

Within the black press, the coverage was much more extensive. Certain black periodicals, especially those targeting the middle class and promoting racial uplift

¹³ "Leland Giants in Double Header" *New York Times*, September 17, 1910, 7; "Donlin and Raymond Play Today" *New York Times*, September 25, 1910, C6; "Leland Giants to Play Ridgewood," *New York Times*, September 30, 1910, 9; "Leland Giants Against Ridgewood" *New York Times*, October 1, 1910, 11; "Sunday Baseball Games" *New York Times*, August 27, 1911, C6.

Figure 2.3: *Collier's*, February 20, 1915



identified Foster as the embodiment of manliness and race success. Magazines like *Half-Century* and *The Competitor* published laudatory articles that praised Foster's moral character and success within a segregated sport.¹⁴ Within these articles, the sportswriters highlighted Foster's adherence to the values expected of an early twentieth-century gentleman and race man.¹⁵

In a *Half-Century* profile of Rube Foster, Howard A. Phelps underscored his moral character, concluding "I wonder at him, not so much as a player now but more for his gentlemanly bearing and conduct."¹⁶ Moreover, Phelps repeatedly praised Foster for

¹⁴ *Half-Century* undoubtedly sold itself to predominately elite blacks, it was the most "upmarket of the new [1910s/1920s] publications." See Graham White and Shane White, *Stylin': Black Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 192. *Half-Century* targeted both male and female readers, advertising itself as a magazine for "the Business Man and the Home Maker." *The Half-Century Magazine*, July 1917, cover page. Through its portrayal of sporting events that required at least a nominal financial outlay, the magazine glamorized sports that were out of the reach for many African Americans, particularly newly arrived migrants from the Deep South. By emphasizing fashionable elite black sporting figures, *Half-Century* prioritized participation in organized sport rather than the informal recreation enjoyed by many black migrants. On informal recreation and black migrants, see Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem'": Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South" *Journal of American History* (June 1993): 84; Ronald L. Lewis, "From Peasant to Proletarian: The Migration of Southern Blacks to the Central Appalachian Coalfields" *Journal of Southern History* (February 1989): 77-102.

¹⁵ Images of African American males that refuted racialist assumptions about "oversexed" and "brute Negroes" were particularly important in the first decades of the twentieth century. On racial stereotypes regarding black manhood, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 276-283.

¹⁶ Howard A. Phelps, "Andrew 'Rube' Foster," *The Half-Century Magazine* March 1919, 8.

his ability to easily navigate through the Jim Crow South, remarking that “Foster has played in all the Southern states using a Pullman all the time and has yet to have any trouble even of minor importance. His ball team has traveled more than all the Colored Clubs combined; as much as any white club.”¹⁷ Phelps also noted that white Southern writers expressed a great deal of admiration of Foster’s athletic prowess. In essence, Phelps applauded Foster’s ability to negotiate through a segregated system without altercation, while simultaneously demonstrating his superior baseball abilities. Phelps identified Foster as “a man of unquestionable race identity.”¹⁸ For many elite blacks, then, Foster was the ultimate “race man,” avoiding controversy, displaying talent, and courting interracial approval.

Within the article, Phelps alluded to actions that were more consistent with the burgeoning New Negro ethos than with the earlier black gentleman model. Phelps highlighted Foster’s athletic skill and the triumph of Fosters’ Lelands over “an aggregation of big leaguers,” during which Foster “pitch[ed] four games and [won] them all.” This discussion of Foster’s victory over a white major league all-star team established Foster’s (and black baseball’s) athletic superiority.¹⁹

Moreover, Foster’s use of a Pullman car for his travels in the south revealed his willingness to subvert Jim Crow conventions in order to claim access to manhood.²⁰ “The Giants’ access to a Pullman car sent a public message about status and exceptionality. In 1916, Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe noted that “Pullman cars in the South

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 8

²⁰ *Ibid.* See also, “The Leland Chicago Giants” *Chicago Defender*, 16 April 1910, 1.

are not as a rule open to members of the Negro race. It is only under more or less unusual conditions that a black man is able to secure Pullman accommodations.”²¹ Within this context, Foster’s rental of private Pullman cars symbolized a subversion of southern segregation: Foster’s Giants traveled through the South by using a form of transportation intended only for whites.

With the establishment of the Negro National League in 1920, black magazine writers linked baseball player’s behavior with the success of black baseball as a race enterprise. Ira F. Lewis, writing for *The Competitor*, predicted that the future of the new league rested upon the “boys themselves.” According to Lewis, “[a] strict observance of training rules, and gentlemanly conduct on the part of the players will do as much towards making the league a success as any amount of money put into the project.”²² In the first two years of the League’s existence, sportswriters with *The Competitor* and *Half-Century* (as well as the owners and managers he interviewed) continued to stress the importance of players presenting themselves as gentleman. C.I. Taylor, owner-manager

²¹ In the essay, Scott and Stowe discussed Booker T. Washington and his travels through the south and explaining Washington’s occasional use of Pullman cars. Scott and Stowe “Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization” (originally published 1916) reprinted in Hugh Hawkins, ed., *Booker T. Washington and His Critics: Black Leadership in Crisis* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974, 1962), 42.

Marlon Ross has noted that Scott and Stowe sent the message that “only the singular leader of the race, because of his unique martyrdom, can afford to evade Jim Crow restrictions as an essential comfort of his self-sacrificing service.” In contrast, memoirist William Pickens “demand[ed] equal treatment for all deserving men,” including access to a Pullman car. Ross, *Manning the Race*, 103. Negro League travel was discussed in greater detail in Chapter One and the trickster tales that involved such travel will be discussed in Chapter Four.

²² Lewis, “National Baseball League Formed,” *The Competitor*, March 1920, 67.

of the Indianapolis A.B.C.'s, proudly reported that he had "never...had the pleasure of preparing a bunch of players who were more gentlemanly... or who more readily absorbed the all-important things required of baseball players."²³

As the Negro National League worked to establish itself as a viable baseball league in the 1920s, team owners tried to regulate the public behaviors of the players. Foster and his counterparts employed various measures to control their players off the field. Foster established curfews for his players and implemented a dress code in order to ensure that the public image of his Giants was beyond reproach. When those measures failed to curb his players' appetite for indulgences, Foster would hold players' pay so that they could not spend it on alcohol, gambling, and women.²⁴ Kansas City Monarchs owner J.L. Wilkinson kept "a tailor...on call to make sure everyone had a nice set of clothes."²⁵ Wilkinson also prohibited players from shooting "craps on the bus or in the hotel" and "fined or fired those who preferred parties over a good game."²⁶

Homestead Grays' owner Cum Posey publicly admonished his players for what he considered problematic behaviors and explicitly tied players' conduct to fan attendance. In a 1925 column in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, he chastised black ballplayers for their behavior. Posey warned Negro League players that their fans would only

²³ Dave Wyatt, "National League of Colored Clubs Prepare for Season's Opening" *The Competitor*, April 1920, 73. The same article highlighted a "high-class performer" on the Detroit Stars and the "new and classy material" on the Dayton club. Wyatt, "National League of Colored Clubs," 74.

²⁴ Webster MacDonald, interview by Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 78.

²⁵ Buck O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time: My Journey from the Negro Leagues to the Majors* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, 1997), 92.

²⁶ O'Neil, *Right on Time*, 92; Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 43.

tolerate so much: "The public is beginning to sympathize with the owners; they are sick of seeing a bunch of good-timers merely putting in a few hours on the ball field between drinks."²⁷

According to Posey and his fellow owners, the public would only patronize sports that featured "gentlemanly" athletes. Within this context, one particular Negro League player (and eventually manager) came to exemplify the lifestyle that team owners desired for their players. Dave Malarcher, a third baseman for the Chicago American Giants, embodied all of the personal attributes inherent in the older model of black manliness. Dubbed "Gentleman Dave," Malarcher expressed a distaste for unsavory pursuits such as drinking, gambling, and womanizing. Once he succeeded Foster as manager of the Giants in 1926, he expanded Foster's code of conduct by requiring his players to attend church services.²⁸

Not all of Malarcher's contemporaries would craft similar gentlemanly public images. Two of the most notable sporting celebrities of the 1920s embraced the excesses of fame, indulging in "dissipations" rather than moderation. White baseball star Babe Ruth enjoyed a rabid following despite his reputation as a heavy drinker and flagrant womanizer.²⁹ Moreover, black prizefighter Jack Johnson continued to attract fans and

²⁷ Cum Posey, "The Sportive Realm" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 November 1925.

²⁸ Webster McDonald, quoted in Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 39.

²⁹ On Babe Ruth, see Robert C. Cottrell, *Blackball, the Black Sox, and the Babe: Baseball's Crucial 1920 Season* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002); Robert W. Creamer, *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York: Fireside Books, 1974, 1992). Richard Bak noted that the Babe suffered physically on at least one occasion due to his sexual relationships, contracting a venereal disease that kept him on the

favorable attention despite his conviction on Mann Act charges and his loss of the heavyweight championship in 1915.³⁰

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the flourishing of black baseball and the ascent of black baseball players as true celebrities for many African Americans. Most information regarding player behavior during from the 1930s and 1940s has come from the player

injured list for a significant portion of the 1925 season. See Bak, *Turkey Stearnes and the Detroit Stars: The Negro Leagues in Detroit, 1919-1933* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 178.

³⁰ “Jack Johnson Professor of Pugilists” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 January 1927; “Respress Drops Us A Line on Johnson” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 July 1921; “The Return of Jack Johnson” *The Competitor*, July 1920, 71; Howard A. Phelps, “Memories of Champions” *Half-Century Magazine*, July 1919, 8. The writers for *Half-Century* and *The Competitor* mentioned Johnson’s travails and legal problems but faulted Johnson only for his “indiscretion” not his actions. Historians of black sport have frequently grappled with Jack Johnson and his role in shaping an alternative manhood ideal for African Americans. On Johnson’s life and times, see Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, NY: 1975); Gilmore, “Jack Johnson and White Women: The National Impact” *Journal of Negro History* (January 1973): 18-38; Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson is a Dandy, An Autobiography* (New York: Chelsea House, 1969); Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004). On Johnson as a “bad man” and subject of folk song and celebration see Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 1978), 419-420; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 441-444. For a sampling of the scholarship on Johnson’s legacy for subsequent black athletes, see Richard Bak, *Joe Louis, The Great Black Hope* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996, 1998), 43-76; Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 437-445; Howard Binham and Max Wallace, *Muhammad Ali’s Greatest Fight: Cassius Clay vs. the United States of America* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 2000), 29-49.

themselves. Numerous players commented on the behavior of their Negro League teammates in oral interviews. Although with few exceptions, most of these former players claimed to have been observers not participants in the activities, their descriptions provide a window into the social life of black baseball players.³¹ The players in question still struggled with the importance of maintaining a clean and moral public image. Most of the interviews took place in the 1970s and 1980s and many players had an interest in promoting their play and accomplishments in order to gain the recognition that they had been denied because of segregation.³² In addition, the National Baseball Hall of Fame began inducting Negro League players through special committees in the 1970s. Understandably, players being considered for inclusion were anxious to make the case for induction and present themselves as “clean living.” Of course, these interests do not indicate that the players were lying to the interviewers. It is likely that the ones who recalled exercising moral restraint did indeed avoid the bad behavior of their teammates. Yet, their ambivalence in describing the antics of other players reveals the degree to which these players still strove to live up to the ideals of “race men.”³³

³¹ Cool Papa Bell, Ted Page, Willie Wells, and James “Joe” Greene, interviews by John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1975, 1993), 127, 149, 224, 305.

³² The timing of these interviews also means that the majority of the interviewees participated in black baseball in the 1930s or later. Many of the men who began their careers in the 1910s or 1920s had already passed away by the time the Negro Leagues were “rediscovered.” On the rediscovery of Negro League baseball, see Robert K. Fitts, “Baseball Cards and Race Relations,” *Journal of American Culture* 17 (Fall 1994): 75-85; Daniel A. Nathan, “Bearing Witness to Blackball: Buck O’Neil, the Negro Leagues, and the Politics of the Past,” *Journal of American Studies* 35 (2001): 453-469.

³³ On the notion of “race men,” see Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 394-395.

Particularly for the young players, black baseball opened the door to a black urban social and cultural milieu that exceeded their expectations.³⁴ Those players who competed on the well-established clubs experienced a greater financial independence than they had ever known. As Pee Wee Butts recalled, “the Kansas City Monarchs were very good at picking up guys in little small towns in Texas and Arkansas.” The Monarchs would then sign the young players and procure a new set of clothes for them. Consequently, “those guys could step out of the clubhouses Sunday sharp as a tack, good dressers, good times, no curfew.”³⁵ Although this behavior did not always guarantee a long and productive career and often hindered one, the young men seized upon the chance to experience a vibrant social scene.³⁶

³⁴ Negro Leaguers took advantage of the vibrant social scene in cities such as Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, and New York. In these metropolitan areas, the players patronized well-known black nightclubs and restaurants, often interacting with local black musicians. Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 41-42; Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 104-105; O’Neil, *Right on Time*, 97-99; Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 76. On Kansas City’s black jazz community, see Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop—A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). According to Driggs and Haddix, the Monarchs were an incredible source of pride for black Kansas City residents, bringing “the community prestige and respect.” *Kansas City Jazz*, 28.

³⁵ Pee Wee Butts, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 345.

³⁶ James ‘Joe’ Greene commented on the detrimental results of such behavior, “Some guy would get a little money in his pocket, go out and stay out all night” then he couldn’t “play ball the next day.” Greene, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 305. For a fictional take on nightlife in the Negro Leagues, see William Brashler, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (New York: Signet, 1973).

Moreover, a significant number of players, both married and single, capitalized on the availability of attractive young women who flocked around the Negro Leaguers. Negro League players recalled the necessity of reaching an “understanding” with their wives. Under this arrangement, Negro League wives had little expectation that their husbands would remain faithful during road trips.³⁷ Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe, one of the league’s more notorious ladies’ men, described the ease by which he entered into romantic relationships as a black ball player. “I didn’t drink or smoke but I was a lady’s man. I always like nice clothes and I ain’t never had enough women—I was just like a cat. When I went into a town I was a good ballplayer and I could get the pick of the girls.”³⁸

Ted Page related a similar story, with a similar disclaimer, about how women could heal rifts among teammates. Page recalled playing “a lot of years with Dick Seay. I was his type: no cussin’, no drinkin’. Those other guys would get a bottle of whiskey and they’d go out to the race track.”³⁹ Despite Page’s reticence in regards to alcohol and gambling, other risky behaviors held an appeal. After getting in a fight with George Scales and spending a tense night sharing a room (both men slept with weapons that evening), Scales remedied the situation by extending an olive branch to Page. “The next night George rounded up two girls, one for him, one for me, and we took them to our room. One was a waitress, the other one, I guess she was a nurse. We had a party....I say

³⁷ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 43.

³⁸ Kyle P. McNary, *Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe: 36 Years of Pitching and Catching in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (Minneapolis: McNary Publishing, 1994), 22.

³⁹ Ted Page, interview by Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 149.

this to show how we lived and how we settled things."⁴⁰ Both Radcliffe and Page described themselves and their teammates as active and interested participants in the black urban social scene of the 1930s and 1940s.

The winter trips to Cuba and other Latin American country provided even more of a respite for players weary of the constant scrutiny of both the black press and anxious team owners. Traveling without their wives, black baseball players seized upon the opportunity to expand their social life without fear of negative repercussions. According to historian Donn Rogosin, those who participated in international winter ball used their distance in order "to sow wild oats away from unsympathetic parents and wives."⁴¹ What Rogosin failed to mention was that for African American ball players, trips abroad allowed them space from the scrutiny of the larger black community as well.

At the same time, players found that being colorful could bring rewards in the form of larger contracts and larger crowds. Answering the call of Langston and Hughes and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Negro League baseball players acted the part of a trickster in order to add color to the game. Satchel Paige, in particular, performed as an athletic

⁴⁰ Page, interview by Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 158.

⁴¹ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 162. Black female performers enjoyed no such freedom. In terms of sexuality, white men had access to white and black women while black men had access to black women. In contrast, black female performers were expected to repress their sexuality. Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 137-141. During World War II, white female baseball players in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League faced similar limitations on their conduct and sexuality. Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 150-152, 155.

trickster on the field.⁴² According to Gerald Early, in his work on black boxing, “the Trickster, inasmuch as he is represented by the slick accomplished boxer, does not need to fear another formidable Trickster...for in the brutal pantomime of the prize ring the Trickster’s technique masks the fact that he is the personification of anarchy.”⁴³ Paige used his stylized skills to tremendous financial advantage. It was Paige’s on the field prowess and showmanship that allowed him to command such extraordinary treatment.⁴⁴ Paige, in an oral interview with James Banker, recalled calling in his infielders before facing a hitter.⁴⁵ Paige would then strike the batter out on three quick strikes. This action was not meant as a pure “stunt,” or an opportunity to embarrass the opposing batter; instead it was intended to increase attendance. Word would quickly spread to the next town, where Paige would play to a capacity crowd.

⁴² Gena Dagal Caponi has discussed in length the aesthetics of black sporting performance and the way in which “‘hotdogging’ becomes ‘community building.’” For Caponi, “the virtuosic individual performance is a social act, inspiring the team and the community. Caponi, *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 3.

⁴³ Gerald Early, *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1994), 6.

⁴⁴ Aaron Baker discusses how Hollywood films in the Jackie Robinson era downplayed the combination of “creative flair with competitive efficacy” that black athletes brought to professional sports. Baker, “From Second String to Solo Star,” 47-48.

⁴⁵ Paige, interview by Banker, *Black Diamonds*. Quincy Troupe described the stunt in a different manner. According to Troupe, at least on one occasion, the infielders and outfielders themselves decided to sit down and forced Paige to strike out the opposing batter. Troupe, *20 Years Too Soon*, 56.

At times, even this trickster stunt had larger political and racial implications. In interracial contests, the stakes were symbolically higher for both teams. For Negro League professionals, a victory over a white team served as another attack against the racial prohibitions of major league baseball. Paige was particularly cognizant of the consequences of such competitions, both for himself and for his fellow players. When Paige traveled to Bismarck, North Dakota to play on an interracial team, he noted the importance of his move. "I was going to be playing with some white boys...It looked like they couldn't hold out against me all the way after all. I'd cracked another little chink in Jim Crow."⁴⁶ While pitching for the Bismarck club, Paige once again demonstrated his supreme confidence and showmanship flair. Paige, up 14-0 against a white semipro team from Kansas, called in both his outfield and infield. In front of a contentious crowd, Paige then struck out the side.⁴⁷ In yet another instance, while facing white major leaguers in an exhibition, Paige raised the stakes even higher. Angry with Chicago Cub Frank Demaree for derogatory comments about his team, Paige seized an opportunity for revenge. Paige intentionally walked enough batters to load the bases when Demaree came to bat. Paige once again called in his outfielders before pitching to Demaree, but this time he also ordered his infielders to sit down. In a one on one battle, Paige struck Demaree out on three straight pitches.⁴⁸ Under such circumstances, Paige's trickster

⁴⁶ Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 114.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁸ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 135; John Holway, "Introduction," *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, vii. Buck O'Neil told a similar story in his memoir. O'Neil recalled that in a game against a semipro Coors Brewing team, Paige overheard one of the Coors players "shouting from the dugout. 'He's nothing but an overrated darkie. Let's beat him.'" "At that point, Paige, who had been wild that day, called in the entire team. "So there we

actions obtained more significance. By triumphing over white players who had access to the major leagues in such an outrageous manner, Paige added yet another “chink” to the prohibition against African American big league ball players.⁴⁹ Perhaps just as significantly, these actions also empowered Paige in terms of his manhood. By triumphing over his opponent, single-handedly, Paige asserted his own masculinity and established his prowess.

In addition to the outrageous on-the-field stunts, Paige demonstrated his trickster tendencies in his pitching movements. One of the most famous photographs of Paige documents his unusual style (Figure 2.4). Paige leaned back, his right leg planted on the ground and right arm, ball in hand, stretched out far behind him. As Paige winds up, his left leg extends in a high kick. Paige then delivers the ball, using the entirety of his long body, to home plate. To increase the drama of his pitching movement, Paige developed the “hesitation pitch,” in which he would briefly stop in mid-motion before releasing the

were, seven of us, all kneeling around the pitching mound. Satchel struck out the next three batters on nine pitches. The fans gave him a standing ovation, and the guys on the other team apologized for what one of them had said.” According to O’Neil, “[f]or Satchel, making believers out of doubters was sweeter than winning any ballgame.” O’Neil, *Right on Time*, 118-119.

⁴⁹ In his autobiography, Paige claimed that a similar stunt established his reputation as a top pitcher in Alabama semi-pro baseball. Paige, *Maybe I’ll Pitch Forever*, 34-35.

Figure 2.4: Paige in windup, Satchel Paige file, NBHFM



pitch.⁵⁰ When this pitch was effective, Paige's erratic movement would thoroughly distract the opposing hitter, causing him to strike out.

Larry Brown, a catcher for the American Giants, also capitalized on similar "trickerations."⁵¹ In the Negro Leagues, "trickerations" encompassed any baseball move or strategy that was not considered common practice in the white major leagues. Everything from clowning (catching in a rocking chair, calling in the infield) to extraordinarily aggressive strategies (long lead-offs, stealing home, unexpected bunts) fell under the umbrella of trickerations. In other words, black baseball employment of a more stylized form of baseball was in itself a "trickeration."⁵² For Brown and Paige, the stylized performance of baseball served both as a competitive and audience-drawing strategy. As a catcher, Brown's "trickerations" centered on challenging and ridiculing the opposing team's baserunners. "I could throw pretty good. The crowd used to roar to see me throw the men out. And I used to the ball and let it roll about eight or ten feet and go get it and then throw the guy out. Make him run."⁵³ By employing his "trickerations," Brown, like Paige, brought anarchy and disorder to a game that insisted upon order.

⁵⁰ Frazier "Slow" Robinson and Paul Bauer, *Catching Dreams: My Life in the Negro Baseball Leagues* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 32; Tom Gilbert, *Baseball and the Color Line* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1995), 125. Robinson caught for Satchel as part of the 1939 Satchel Paige's All-Stars.

⁵¹ Brown, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 220.

⁵² Aaron Baker describes Hollywood's unwillingness to recognize these trickerations or stylized athletic performances in the construction of movie narratives, particularly *The Jackie Robinson Story*, "From Second String to Solo Star," *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, 47-48.

⁵³ Brown, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 220.

Moreover, their unique strategies brought additional suspense and excitement to the game, increasing their fan base. Thus, they helped shaped Negro League baseball into a new, more stylized type of baseball.

Sportswriters rarely documented the off-the-field misdeeds of black baseball players. As active stakeholders in the promotion of the game, members of the black press had little to gain from spotlighting Negro Leaguers taking advantage of the local nightlife by drinking, gambling, and having affairs. Instead the black press actively refuted charges of misconduct by white periodicals and white baseball officials.⁵⁴ In the 1930s, the financial demands of the Depression meant that team owners could not afford to alienate paying customers. Consequently, they marketed their ability to “guarantee good order” and profited from the willingness of black writers to gloss over any player misconduct when possible.⁵⁵

In one instance, a sportswriter tried to counteract Paige’s public reputation as a partier, womanizer, and trickster. Al Monroe, in his *Chicago Defender* column, remarked upon Paige’s apparently unremarkable social life. According to Monroe, Paige “was one of the quietest man in baseball.” Monroe also praised Paige for being “The best dressed man in baseball, owner or otherwise.”⁵⁶ Perhaps undercutting his own conclusions regarding Paige’s demeanor and behavior, Monroe noted that despite occupying the room next to Paige, he had “yet to hear or see him in his room.” Although

⁵⁴ Ira F. Lewis “The Passing Review” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 April 1932.

⁵⁵ “Great Base Ball Attraction” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 2 September 1932; “Base Ball Extraordinary” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 2 September 1932; “Base Ball Championship Game” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 9 September 1932.

⁵⁶ Al Monroe, “It’s News To Me” *Chicago Defender*, 25 September 1937.

Monroe claimed that Paige's quiet reserve explained this lack of notice, accounts by his teammates (and by Paige himself) have suggested that Paige was probably out on the town and occupying night clubs instead.⁵⁷

Only in rare instances, did black sportswriters report on players' misdeeds. Wendell Smith, for instance, took Satchel Paige to task for "loll[ing] around in the dressing room while his mates were out on the field taking a shellacking from the Homestead Grays."⁵⁸ Yet even though Smith implied that Paige was lazy, disinterested, and perhaps distracted by other more exciting diversions, he did not directly accuse him of immoral behavior. Instead, Smith attempted to shame Paige into straightening up his act.⁵⁹ When Smith wrote, in 1943, the possibility of baseball integration was becoming more immediate. Consequently, Smith and his fellow sportswriters sought to establish the strong athletic and moral credentials of Negro League players in order to persuade the white major leagues to open the door.

Throughout the Negro League period, black baseball received a great amount of public scrutiny. White opponents of integration frequently invoked a "character clause" when defending segregated baseball, arguing that black players and fans lacked the necessary character to qualify for the white major leagues.⁶⁰ Thus, in order to challenge

⁵⁷ See Satchel Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever: A Great Baseball Player Tells the Hilarious Story Behind the Legend* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1962, 1993). Paige's showmanship and lifestyle will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁸ Wendell Smith, Paige 'Thumbs Nose' At His Public Here" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 June 1943.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Moreover, there is no evidence that the white major leagues released players because of character or morality deficiencies. Yet, this argument, which easily fit into contemporary racist stereotypes of African

this (hypocritical) claim of moral superiority, black writers highlighted the “gentlemanly” nature of African American players and advised fans to avoid any problematic pursuits or behaviors during their attendance at games.⁶¹

Within this context of potential integration and black enterprise, both sportswriters and Negro League officials publicized the need for strict rules of conduct. Al Monroe addressed both the behavior of fans and of players in a 1934 *Chicago Defender* column. Monroe praised Chicago American Giants owner Robert Cole for his commitment to respectable behavior. Noting the Giants’ strong attendance numbers, Monroe attributed fan support to the fact that “Cole and his associates have promised that

American men as physically strong but morally inferior, was pervasive during the Jim Crow era and was repeated by former Negro League players. Buck Leonard made this argument in an oral interview. “There was one requirement in the major leagues that we didn’t have, and that was your character. If you don’t have good character, you don’t stay in the major leagues long. But if you could play ball, regardless of your character, you could come in our leagues.” Leonard, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 269.

⁶¹ A contemporary joke flipped this notion of moral superiority, by inverting the stereotype. *Life* reprinted the following joke (as originally printed in the *New York Evening Graphic*) in 1930 and claimed it was “Harlem’s favorite joke.” A “Caucasian gent...remarked to his negro valet, ‘Washington, I dreamed last night that I went to the Negro paradise. It was very dirty and full of rubbish. And just packed to the heavenly gates with your people in rags.’ ‘That’s nothin’, sah!’ chuckled the colorado-maduro lad, ‘Ah dun dreamt I went to de white folkses’ heaven. It shoh was nice dere. Flowers and pretty smells and trees everywhere. But, Lordy, it was empty!’” “Those Foolish Contemporaries,” *Life* 96, November 14, 1930, 24.

there will be no misgivings in conduct tolerated on the ballfield.” Moreover, “they have majored in an attempt to keep all promises as to attractions and courtesies to patrons.”⁶²

Similarly, at least two Negro League managers also expressed concern over players’ behavior. In 1936, former manager Jim Taylor advised League players and owners that they could only survive and thrive in the Depression if players were closely constrained. Taylor observed “[i]n the last few years the ball player has been allowed to do as he pleases with no one to demand his living clean. There was a time when we were told to be in bed at a certain hour every night and the manager was instructed...to see that you were.”⁶³

Three years later, another League manager would argue that player conduct could impede successful integration. In a *Baltimore Afro-American* article, Felton Snow cautioned that integration might be difficult due to players’ attitudes and habits. According to Snow, “there are so many men that get three of [sic] four dollars in their pockets and right away want to tell ‘the man’ where he can go.”⁶⁴

As race heroes, black baseball players struggled with the demands of two competing roles.⁶⁵ The black sporting press and black elites encouraged the players to

⁶² Al Monroe, “Speaking of Sports” *Chicago Defender*, 30 June 1934.

⁶³ Taylor also underscored the need to protect “lady fans” by keeping parks “clean.” “Very often some of our lady fans go to our parks and have to go to the cleaners on Monday.” Jim Taylor, “Taylor Says Poor Umpiring Bad Management Harmful” *Chicago Defender*, 22 February 1936.

⁶⁴ Sam Lacy, “Players Indifferent About Entering Major Leagues” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 August 1939.

⁶⁵ On “race heroes,” see St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 390-397.

serve as models of behavior and integrity, to function as positive race representatives in the minds of both blacks and whites.⁶⁶ Famed black sportswriter Wendell Smith once equated black baseball players to race “ambassadors,” “[e]very Negro in public life stands for something more than the role he is portraying...whether he likes it or not.”⁶⁷ Yet, their performance as heroic badmen was also significant. As badmen heroes, they

⁶⁶ This behavioral ideal reflects both the black elite’s desire for public respectability as well as the African notion of maintaining cool. Robert Farris Thompson has defined the cool as the overall principle that allows communities to function and thrive in a orderly, cohesive manner. In the West African communities studied by Thompson, the performers of the “dance of derision” communicate to their audience the idea that cool should be maintained despite “those who would break the rules of society.” Thus, “[t]he dance of derision attests that although most West African dances exist as concrete metaphors of right living, some Africans do cheat, steal, and kill. Terrible events occur in West Africa not because the inhabitants lack moral control (their dances make this clear), but because thus far no society on earth has ever completely satisfied or embodied a definition of ideal behavior.” Thompson, “An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance” *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, Gena Dagel Caponi, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 83-84.

⁶⁷ Wendell Smith, quoted in Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (New York: Kodansha International, 1995, 1983), 149. This conception of black athletes as race ambassadors or at the very least race representatives did not change during the existence of the Negro League. In the early 1920s, the *Union* newspaper lauded Rube Foster for “doing something for his race, as well as for baseball....the conduct of his players both on and off the field is a lesson for many white teams.” Similarly, *The Competitor* praised track star Sol Butler, noting that “he always considered the fact before a vast audience where he was usually the only colored man competing, that he was representing his race, and the people could rest assured that his personal conduct would certainly reflect no discredit on his race.” “Sol Butler on All-American Track Team” *The Competitor* February 1920, 80. On everyday resistance during Jim Crow, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 55-76.

employed strategies of resistance designed to critique white authority and to effect change in race relations.⁶⁸ As badmen, rather than sanitized race heroes, black athletes provided a more relatable, and at times more satisfactory, public model. Unlike the traditional nineteenth-century folkloric badmen, the twentieth-century badmen often escaped without the condemnation of the law.⁶⁹ Utilizing the quick wit of the trickster, these “new” badmen often avoided imprisonment and becoming the victim of extralegal violence.⁷⁰ Working-class blacks delighted in the stories of the badmen, while the black elite, fearful of any negative repercussions, condemned the badmen’s behavior as subversive and problematic.⁷¹

One such story (originally told about Jack Johnson) had Paige speeding down a highway when he was stopped by a white sheriff.⁷² The sheriff informed Paige that he

⁶⁹ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 211-212.

⁷⁰ Jack Johnson was a good example of a badman who was not able to escape punishment of white authority. Likewise, Muhammad Ali would later be subject to criminal persecution and the loss of his boxing license due to his challenge of an induction order and his outspoken stance against the Vietnam War. See, Bingham and Wallace, *Muhammad Ali’s Greatest Fight*.

⁷¹ Drake and Cayton dub this character the “bad Negro.” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 295; Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 213.

⁷² Mark S. Foster relates a similar account regarding a black woman being pulled over in the South while driving a luxury car. The woman easily paid the extravagant fine demanded by the white officer, leaving him dumbstruck. “When Naomi counted out enough cash money to pay the fine, the policeman’s eyes popped out....There was nothing left for him to do but take all that money from a ‘nigra’ and let her go.” Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945” *Journal of Negro History* 84 (Spring 1999): 143.

owed twenty-five dollars for a speeding ticket. Paige quickly pulled out a fifty-dollar bill and told the officer to keep the change because he was going to be coming back the same way. Perhaps reflective of the Depression-era context of Paige's story, the amount of money is half that mentioned in the World War I Era Johnson version.

It was on a hot day in Georgia when Jack Johnson drove into town. He was really flying: Zoom! Behind his fine car was a cloud of red Georgia dust as far as the eye could see. The sheriff flagged him down and said 'Where do you think you're going, boy, speeding like that? That'll cost you \$50.00.' Jack Johnson never looked up; he just reached in his pocket and handed the sheriff a \$100.00 bill and started to gun the motor; ruuummmmm, ruuummmmm. Just before Jack pulled off the sheriff shouted 'Don't you want your change?' and Jack replied, "Keep it, 'cause I'm coming back the same way I'm going!" Zooodooom.⁷³

Yet another version of this story removes the sheriff as the antagonist. "Double Duty" Radcliffe, Paige's teammate on an integrated North Dakota club, related a tale of Paige's challenge to a white judge in Kansas. According to Radcliffe, a police officer had stopped Paige, in a fancy new Lincoln, for speeding. Brought before the judge and fined forty dollars, Paige "pulled eighty dollars from his wallet and said 'Here you go judge, 'cause I'm coming back tomorrow.'"⁷⁴

Frank Duncan, Jr., however, offered the ultimate twist on this frequently repeated tale. Duncan claimed that he accompanied Paige on a barnstorming trip through Wyoming. The story proceeded like the other iterations with a significant difference. Instead of merely handing over the \$50 bill and taking off, Paige "got outta the car and was walkin' down the side of the road with the guy, arm around him....when Satchel got back to the car, he...showed us the \$50 bill."⁷⁵

⁷³ Al-Tony Gilmore. *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, NY: 1975), 21.

⁷⁴ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 133.

⁷⁵ Frank Duncan, Jr., interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 100.

In the multiple versions of this tale, Paige assumes a dual role as hero and trickster. As the hero of the tale, Paige counters the stereotype of the poor African American. Not only can Paige afford the fancy car he is driving, he also has enough cash to pay the speeding fine twice. As a trickster, Paige escapes from a potentially dangerous situation, being pulled over by a white sheriff. In some iterations of this story, including the initial Jack Johnson version, a southern setting increases the dangerous tone of this tale. Paige's and Johnson's black audiences were well aware of the vulnerability of a black traveler in such a situation. As a result of being pulled over, both men were vulnerable to physical harm from the officer and incarceration into convict labor had they been unable to pay.⁷⁶ A common outcome that Chuck Berry lyrically immortalized in the

⁷⁶Herbert J. Seligmann detailed the horrific use of peonage to virtually enslave and physically abuse African Americans in Georgia. The author was responding, in part, to the murder of an African American man by the white farmer for whom he toiled in peonage. Seligmann, "Why Negroes Leave the Farm: A Federal Investigation Must Come" *The Competitor* (June 1921), 6. Leon Litwack described various incidents of peonage and forced labor throughout the south. "All too often, peonage operated with the full connivance and encouragement of state and local authorities. Convicted of a crime, the black offender would have to pay both a fine and court costs, more than he or she could afford. But an employer would then intercede to pay the fine, requiring the offender to work for him until the debt had been settled." Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 140-141. Similarly, editors at *The Competitor* argued that the state of Georgia was complicit in maintaining peonage and calls on state officials to remedy the situation. "Georgia and Peonage" *The Competitor* (May 1921), 3. See also, "The Colored Press on Georgia Peonage" *The Competitor* (May 1921), 8-12. On violence encountered by another group of performers, black all-girl bands, see Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 137, 144-147.

song “Brown Eyed Handsome Man.” In the 1956 Berry song, the protagonist faces “charges of unemployment” and the possibility of jail time or peonage.⁷⁷ Instead of either of those dire outcomes, Paige turns the situation to his advantage, using his wit to outsmart the sheriff. And, in the most fantastical of the tales, he emerged completely unscathed, having convinced the sheriff to refund his fine.

Paige’s tale has special significance because of the relationship between African Americans and white law enforcement in the early twentieth century. According to Roberts, in trickster tales following Emancipation the white law authorities took the place of the slave master in such tales.⁷⁸ In essence, both Paige and the white sheriff are symbolic in this folktale. Paige represents resistance and civil disobedience against the white sheriff who represents all of the potential inequities of law enforcement during Jim Crow.⁷⁹ Particularly, for African Americans familiar with the badman folk hero tales of the early twentieth century, Paige’s actions are significant as part of a much larger tradition. Paige’s disobedience is a heroic, trickster-like action that fulfills the desire of African Americans to outwit a police officer without violent repercussions.

Paige fulfilled the role of trickster for overcoming not only the white law enforcement authority but the economic barriers faced by African Americans, particularly in the Depression-Era South. Throughout the tale, signs of wealth were emphasized.

⁷⁷ Berry spent time in prison for a string of armed robberies committed when he was a teenager. Bruce Pegg, *Brown Eyed Handsome Man: The Life and Hard Times of Chuck Berry* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 14-15, 67.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 197.

⁷⁹ Litwack describes the fear and distrust many blacks in the South had for police officers. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 15-16.

Paige drove an expensive vehicle, carried a large amount of cash for the time, and the tale's turning point centered on Paige's casual ability to pay double the amount required. In the story, and in reality, Paige's ability to flaunt his wealth as superior to the majority of whites demonstrated his vast economic success despite the obstacles of Jim Crow.⁸⁰ In particular, by emphasizing his wealth to a white police officer, who at the time usually would have been from a lower class background, Paige proved his economic superiority over a man who generally would feel most threatened by the economic success of a black man.⁸¹ Especially in the time of the Depression, Paige's ability to perform as a consumer, provider, and participant in the display of wealth signified a special and masculine achievement. Moreover, because of his race, Paige's financial success

⁸⁰ James Joe Greene described Satchel thusly, "Satchel liked the fast life. He always had fast cars, Lincoln Continentals, tailor-made suits, and plenty of women." Greene interview by John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York, 1975, revised edition, New York: DaCapo Press, 1993), 340. According to Bruce Chadwick, Satchel earned \$50,000 a year during the Depression. *When the Game Was Black and White: The Illustrated History of the Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992). Paige was not alone, Quincy Troupe described his father in a similar manner, "My father was a tall man, six-foot-three, strong and handsome. He was brown-skinned, a very dapper dresser, and wore the latest and best of fashions- wide-lapel suits and sports coats, oversized, with two buttons; loosely draped pants and "bad to the bone," two-toned Foot Joy shoes; wide-brimmed Panama hats and gold Rolex watches. He always drove a new Cadillac or Chrysler. Only the best was good enough for my father." Troupe, "Pain and Glory: Some Thoughts on My Father" in Don Belton, ed., *Speak My Name: Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 243.

⁸¹ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 197-198.

symbolized a direct attack against the limitations of Jim Crow and helped to define him as a true economic threat to the racial system of the time.⁸²

Moreover, the tale's symbolic power is increased by the disconnect between the events of the tale and the everyday experience of African Americans. Travel was an especially dangerous undertaking for African Americans in the early twentieth century. For black observers, accounts of how African American celebrities dealt with the same issues and "racist conditions" that were a part of daily life for ordinary black folks were particularly applicable. As Arthur Knight noted in his essay "Star Dances," "Black stars...embodied African American social and cultural history, connectedness, courage and the expressive freedom possible within the racialized limits of sociopolitical freedom in the United States."⁸³

One of Paige's encounters with southern white law enforcement illustrated the ways in which African American ballplayers struggled to walk the line in order to maintain a public image as badmen without ending up in jail. In 1928, on a trip home to Mobile to visit his family, a white sheriff spotted Paige driving down the Alabama Interstate "[i]n his shiny red roadster, looking as fly as a man in a blue suit, straw hat, and spats could look." The sheriff pegged Paige as a car thief, unwilling to believe that Paige was the rightful owner of the vehicle. Deaf to Paige's insistence on his innocence and his athletic fame, the sheriff arrested Paige. After spending a long night in the Mobile

⁸² Leon Litwack has argued that African American economic success posed the greatest threat to whites and the Jim Crow system in the postbellum United States. *Trouble in Mind*, 152-163.

⁸³ Arthur Knight, "Star Dances: African American Constructions of Stardom, 1925-1960" *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, Daniel Bernardi, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 406.

county jail, Paige was released after a reporter from the Chicago *Defender* vouched for his character.⁸⁴ Other African Americans, familiar with similar incidents, found in Paige's folktale retribution for years of false incrimination by white law authorities.

Paige's two disparate encounters with white law enforcement also speak to the tenuous line walked by black celebrities under Jim Crow. Both too little notice and too much attention could result in potentially dangerous situations for black celebrities like Paige. The most well-known black stars (particularly non-Hollywood celebrities) were unknown to certain segments of the white population, thus placing black stars like Paige into situations like the one described above, trying desperately to prove their status to disbelieving (or disinterested) white authorities.⁸⁵ Yet, when black celebrities engendered a great deal of attention from whites, they were also the target of suspicion and potential legal repercussions. Jack Johnson served as the most potent example of a black celebrity, despised by whites, and brought down by trumped up legal charges.

After Johnson's arrest on white slavery charges, black stars attempted to negotiate the precariousness of African American celebrity status with greater care. Jesse Owens and Joe Louis were especially diligent about cultivating public images that fit with the

⁸⁴ Mark Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 62. Ribowsky's sources for this story were Paige's daughter and one of his friends. I have not found coverage of this incident in the *Defender*. Yet, the fact that the tale was repeated by two different sources speaks to its veracity or at least to its circulation.

⁸⁵ Knight, "Star Dances," 405-406. For more information on black celebrity athletes, see Andrew M. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 103-140.

expectations of whites and the black elite. As such, Owens and Lewis served as the ultimate race ambassadors.⁸⁶ Paige, on the other hand, never fit the role of ambassador. Nor did he embrace Johnson's brash disregard for the social-cultural norms under Jim Crow. Instead, he fashioned himself as a subtle badman, a resistant hero made all the more potent by his fool's clothing.

Some of Paige's contemporaries took a more direct route, embracing the role of bad man. Having survived years of frustration and racial discrimination, some players were unwilling to tolerate further abuse by hostile whites. Thus, when they had the opportunity to strike back, they did.

⁸⁶ Aaron Baker demonstrates how the Hollywood movie interpretations of race ambassadors like Louis and Jackie Robinson employed narratives that highlighted their hard work and dedication while avoiding notions of class conflict, black agency (white managers and authorities are given credit for much of the athletes' success), and individuality. Aaron Baker, "From Second String to Solo Star: Classic Hollywood and the Black Athlete," *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, 31-51. During the cold war, "race ambassador" became an official position for a number of black musicians. In 1956, the U.S. State Department instituted a jazz ambassador program through which artists like Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong traveled to other countries and performed. The government hoped that these "ambassadors" would convince members of the international community that the U.S. was making progress in terms of civil rights and win the goodwill of other nations through this sharing of the arts. Most importantly, government officials intended for these ambassadors to further the U.S.'s cold war goals. See Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). These jazz ambassadors did not always tow the government line by painting a positive picture of United States race relations. Other musicians and performers explicitly denounced U.S. racial policies during their tours abroad. On Josephine Baker's cold war activism and the U.S. government's attempt to contain her, see Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War" *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 543-570.

One such player was Quincy Troupe. Troupe recalled touring through Arkansas as manager of the Cleveland Buckeyes. Because Troupe served as manager from 1945-1947, the following encounter would have occurred within that time period.⁸⁷ While the team bus was stopped, two white men approached the team and expressed their disapproval of African Americans from the North traveling through the South. The two men threatened the players and two Buckeyes responded physically. According to Troupe, "My two players lit into them and planted knuckle sandwiches all over their heads. When it was all over two Southern white men were laying stretched out cold in the hard, sun-baked ground of Arkansas." Troupe then gathered the team and quickly left, "headed for the Missouri line."⁸⁸ According to Troupe, after the team traveled fifty miles away from the site of the incident, a highway patrolman stopped the bus. The patrolman suspected that the players had attacked the white men and left them but Troupe convinced him that he was targeting the wrong men. The bus then departed and the team safely arrived at the next stop.⁸⁹

Troupe and his players functioned as "badmen" and outlaw folk heroes in the above story. By performing their retaliation against the white men outside of the public realm, Troupe and the Buckeyes were able to respond in kind to the violent threat of the men and do so without the repercussion of the law. The players did commit an illegal

⁸⁷ This story is perhaps less surprising due to its context. World War II, the presence of black soldiers, and the attendant push for increased civil rights increased racial tensions, especially in the south. Some African Americans began to more publicly reject segregated seating and accommodations. See Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 55-76.

⁸⁸ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 133.

⁸⁹ Troupe, *20 Years Too Soon*, 102.

act, in terms of the law, qualifying them as “badmen” or “outlaws.” Yet, they also fulfilled the role of hero, by partaking of “justifiable retaliatory action” in an arena outside of white authority.⁹⁰ Moreover, when the patrolman questioned the players, their leader, Troupe, persuaded the officer to search elsewhere for the assailants. Thus, these men minimized the risk for African Americans in general, by not attracting general public notice and negative publicity, while still achieving a means of racial justice.⁹¹

Throughout the Jim Crow era, African Americans struggled to define manhood on their own terms. The conception of the New Negro manhood provided an outlet for individuality that had been missing under previous conceptions of black manliness. Yet, limitations still existed. As black baseball advocates strived to ensure the profitability of their black enterprise and to pave the way for integration, the public behavior of African American fans and players came under scrutiny. In the interwar period, owners and writers promoted black baseball players as respectable men, even while those players tested the limits of acceptable public morality.

In the 1930s and 1940s, sportswriters glossed over any unsavory conduct on the part of players and instructed fans on how to behave at games. Yet, at the same time, African Americans were unwilling to revert to the “gentleman” model of the early twentieth century in order to please elite reformers. Instead, they continued to gamble, flirt, drink, and carouse within the confines of local black communities, a strategy that would keep such behavior an open secret. More explicit challenges to white supremacy and the color line manifested themselves in newspaper editorial art, photographs, and

⁹⁰ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 205.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 205-213.

advertisements. Likewise, African Americans capitalized on a vernacular expressive culture to circulate trickster tales; tales that celebrated black baseball players' masculinity and their performance as "badmen."

CHAPTER THREE

Representing Race: Black Baseball and Visual Images

In the nineteenth century, Currier and Ives produced a number of prints that depicted baseball. In 1882, as part of their “Darktown Comics” series, Currier and Ives produced a print entitled *A Base Hit*, depicting a group of African Americans ineptly trying to play baseball (Figure 3.1). In the print, three African American players dive and stumble for the baseball. At the same time, a passerby is hit by that baseball and knocked off his feet. Examining the background of the print, four players are simultaneously occupying first base, while three players in left field are lounging rather than playing. Additionally, the artist, Thomas Worth, drew the players in the foreground of the picture in a way that exaggerated their facial features and reflected nineteenth-century stereotypes about African Americans.¹

¹ Worth was a freelance artist who specialized in comic/caricature prints and was responsible for Currier and Ives’s *Darktown Comics* series. Worth would sketch a scene and then submit it to Currier and Ives, if they wanted to print it, they would then compensate Worth for his work. F. A. Conningham, *Currier & Ives* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1950), 40-41.

Figure 3. 1: Thomas Worth, "A Base Hit" *Darktown Comics*, Currier and Ives, 1882.

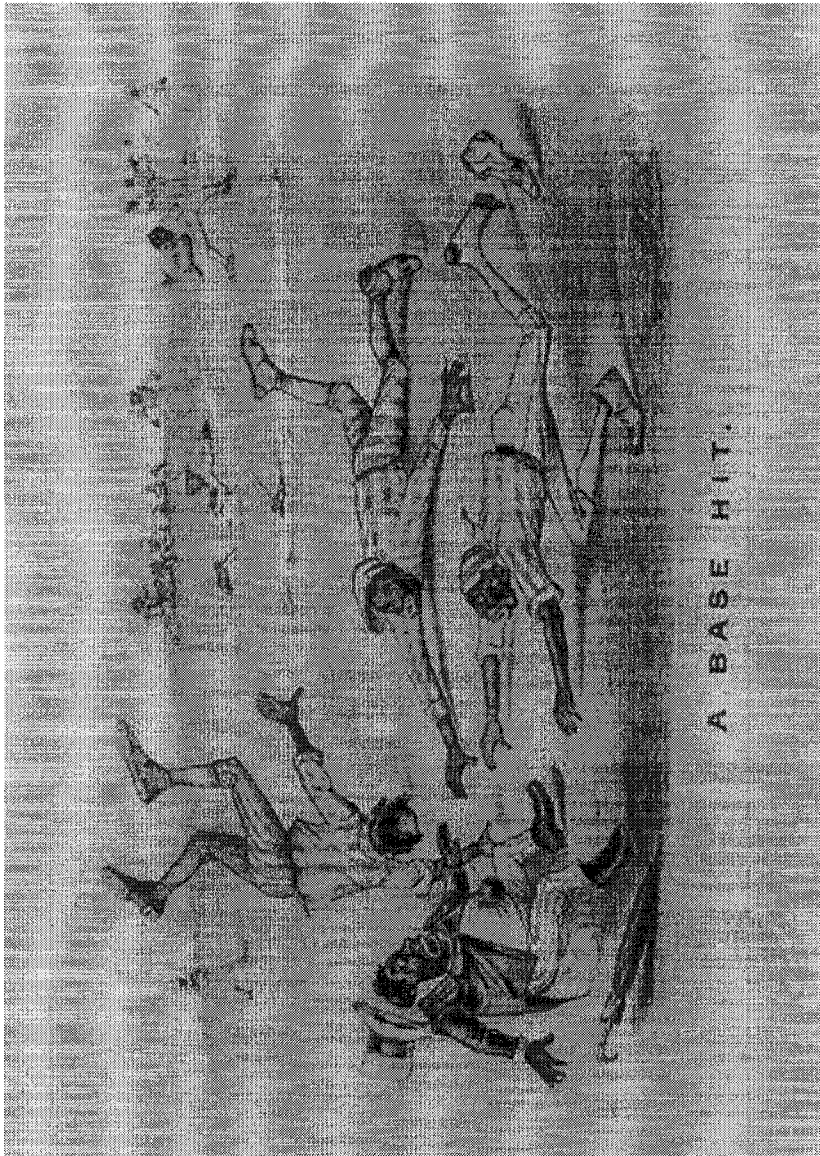


Figure 3. 2: Thomas Worth, "Base Ball at Blackville," *Darktown Comics*, Currier and Ives, 1882.



Other *Darktown Comics* devoted to baseball played upon the same racial imagery of “A Base Hit.” In one such print, published in *Harper’s Weekly*, the baseball diamond is the scene of complete chaos (Figure 3.2). The artist crowded the print with caricatures of African Americans, none of whom can successfully participate in the game. The players seem to have little if any understanding of the rules of baseball, lacking even the knowledge of where or how to stand on a diamond. A player in what would roughly be considered the shortstop position has adopted a catcher’s crouch, while the entire right side of the field (first base, second base, right field) appears to be devoid of fielders. Additionally, the artist portrayed the athletes as unable to even follow the sporting action as they all are looking in different directions. Moreover, the batter is not in proper stance, but instead is attempting to hit the ball off of his own face, presumably because no one has taken on the role of pitcher.

In this print, the artist also reproduced minstrel stereotypes.² The stereotypes include that of the lazy black man as many of the men in the foreground are reposed, and the black dandy represented by the overdressed umpire with hat, long jacket and cane.³

² On minstrel stereotypes and their dissemination, see Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). On stereotypes and archetypes in movies, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: the Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

³ It is important to note that Worth’s depiction of the clothing choices of the baseball umpire reflects more than a stereotype. African Americans embraced stylized clothes in order to challenge presumptions about

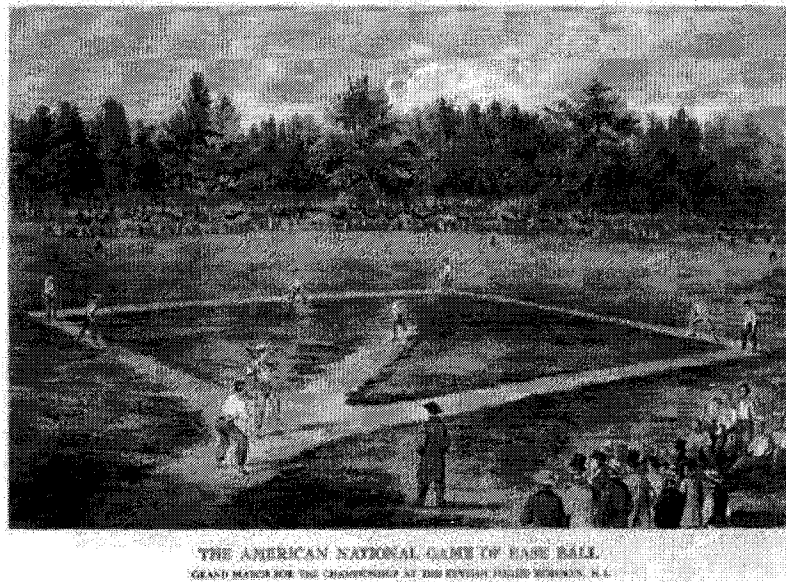
In contrast, Currier and Ives prints of contemporary white baseball emphasize a serene, well-organized game, in keeping with white baseball's claims to be a dignified and truly American sport ("The American National Game of Base Ball" Figure 3.3). The white baseball print depicts a professionally played game on a well-maintained and manicured diamond. The players are in proper position.

This Currier and Ives prints helped to spread and reinforce the public opinion that African Americans were not qualified to play the "national game." In the first half of the twentieth century, African American publications challenged such prevalent negative stereotypes through the valorization of black athletes and recreational sport. In particular, major black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* highlighted Negro League baseball in their news coverage, devoting regular column space and resources to the coverage of black baseball.

In this chapter, I interrogate mass publication images of black baseball produced and disseminated in the 1915-1946 era, the golden age of the Negro Leagues. As discussed in the previous chapters, larger societal moves to support black enterprise and to facilitate future moves toward integration marked this time period, particularly the

their wealth and status. By employing the sartorial signs of the rich, men like the umpire both contradicted stereotypes that conflated class and race and expressed their own vision of how a man should dress. On clothing choices, style, and culture, see Graham White and Shane White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginning to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 140-141, 151-152. Studying a later time period, Robin D.G. Kelley has analyzed how wearing a zoot suit during World War II represented political form of working-class, African American resistance. See Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 161-182

Figure 3. 3: Currier and Ives, “The American National Game of Base Ball” 1862



latter half of the era. Within this context, I analyze these images to answer the following questions: How did African American newspapers and magazines portray black baseball? What implications did these images have for the readers of these periodicals? What do these images communicate about societal and cultural ideals of African Americans during this time period? Moreover, how did these images reflect contemporary expectations regarding race, class, and gender?

Black press images challenged the implicit and explicit racist assumptions inherent in negative white depictions of black athletes. For the readership of periodicals like the *Courier*, *Defender*, and *Afro-American*, the dignified portraits of sporting stars granted their athletic idols the respect they had earned at the ballpark, on the gridiron, and in the boxing ring. Moreover, contemporary pieces of editorial art attacked the hypocrisy of segregated baseball and proclaimed the moral and athletic superiority of the Negro Leagues. These visual images reflected black fans' observations and beliefs about the athletic talent possessed by their favorite ball players. As such, positive visual images performed a crucial function in an era when widely disseminated images of African Americans at play reinforced the exaggerated racial stereotypes common in minstrel shows.

The Darktown Comics prints, as part of a larger late nineteenth/early twentieth century trend, used visual images that depicted African Americans as primitive and oafish. As such, they helped to spread and reinforce the public opinion that African

Americans were not qualified to play the “national game.”⁴ In the first half of the twentieth century, with the influx of black migrants to industrial cities, African American publications challenged such prevalent negative stereotypes through the valorization of black athletes and recreational sport.

Among white papers, the *Chicago Daily News* was unusual in its early and positive depiction of African American baseball players. As early as 1903, the *Daily News* began to occasionally cover black baseball and the few local integrated high school level baseball teams.⁵ *Daily News* photographers documented members of the Chicago black baseball clubs in a variety of shots. The initial 1903 photographs showed an integrated high school baseball team in Chicago.⁶ By 1905, the white press’s limited coverage of black ballplayers featured segregated semi-professional baseball teams

⁴ Albert Spalding perpetuated the myth of white baseball as a pastoral and patriotic American invention in order to benefit his sporting goods business. Albert Spalding, *America’s National Game* (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1911). On the mythology of American baseball, see David McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball: America’s Pastime and Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2000).

⁵ Chicago public schools had an official policy of integration. In reality, however, white citizens and officials worked to ensure that schools had sufficiently imbalanced racial makeup. As a result, Chicago high schools were frequently disproportionately white or black. African American students were permitted to compete on public school athletic teams but “did not share in social activities.” Private and Catholic schools did enforce segregation. Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 44-46, 204-205.

⁶ *Chicago Daily News* negatives collection, Chicago Historical Society (CHS), 1903, SDN-001216 and SDN-001217.

competing in the Chicago area. Many of these photographs were group shots, with the team aligned and posed in a way familiar to any reader of the sports pages. These pictures had the same composition as those made of contemporary white baseball teams.⁷ In addition to the familiar team shots, the *Daily News* photographers also captured individual players in very posed configurations. Although these poses were meant to suggest live action shots (the players are in motion, batters in stance, pitchers in wind up), the backgrounds of the photographs betray their artificial nature. In one picture, a batter is shown in stance, but without a catcher or umpire (Figure 3.4).⁸ Likewise, in the photos of the pitcher, the field is devoid of any other players.⁹ In a 1909 series of photographs, most of the pictured show the players on the sidelines, clearly outside of the playing field, again in mock-motion.¹⁰ The *Daily News* also photographed images from a 1907 interracial game between the Leland Giants and a squad of white all-stars.¹¹

While one would expect a white newspaper to cover the meetings between a white and black squad, the *Daily News*' attention (although limited) to black baseball within Chicago demonstrates both the importance of black baseball to Chicago during the early part of the twentieth century as well as the more fluid racial lines that characterized

⁷ *Chicago Daily News*, 1905, SDN-003080.

⁸ *Chicago Daily News*, 1909, SDN-0055384.

⁹ *Chicago Daily News*, 1909, SDN-003137 and SDN-003083.

¹⁰ *Chicago Daily News*, 1907, SDN-055358, SDN-055361, SDN-055355, and SDN-055360.

¹¹ *Chicago Daily News*, 1907, SDN-055360.

Figure 3.4: *Chicago Daily News* 1909, Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago Historical Society.



industrial cities like Chicago in the years preceding the Great Migration.¹² The posed nature of the picture and the similarities to those of contemporary white teams suggest that the photographers for the *Daily News* made little distinction between white and black baseball teams and players during the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, the fact that the *Daily News* bothered to cover black baseball, particularly outside of interracial contests, indicates that the newspaper was trying to either reach out to a black readership and/or that the white readers of the paper were interested in black baseball.¹³ While it was not unusual to see coverage of black ball in other white newspapers of the time, most of these papers were in smaller markets devoid of professional baseball and merely reported on any traveling baseball team that made a local stop. Chicago, on the other hand, had a thriving major league baseball scene, with both the Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox competing regularly in the city. In either situation, the presence of these photographs indicates a less restrictive racial climate in Chicago during this time period, at least as it applied to sport and leisure.

This more benevolent treatment of African Americans would be short lived. Before World War I and the attendant increased need for labor in urban centers, African

¹² With the advent of World War I, confluent concerns of ethnic nationalism and black migration created very regimented ethnic neighborhoods within Chicago. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 29, 34-36.

¹³ William "Sug" Cornelius recalled that metropolitan white newspapers rarely reported on black baseball until Ape Saperstein, a white promoter, began petitioning the white media on behalf of the Negro Leagues. William "Sug" Cornelius interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1975, 1993), 246. Small town papers, however, would highlight black baseball when it came to the local area.

Americans residing in the north did not generally encounter widespread, explicit segregation and racially based violence. The growing black population had a significant impact on racial relations in northern cities. According to Allen Spear, “many whites...felt threatened by Negroes. They responded by attempting to tighten the color bar in housing, schools, and public accommodations. Failing that, some resorted to terrorism. The occasional skirmishes of the prewar period gave way to organized guerilla warfare.”¹⁴ Recreational spaces frequently served as flash points as black and whites fought to carve out public spaces for leisure.¹⁵ This hardening of de facto segregation within northern cities, particularly in regards to leisure space, resulted in a more strict racial division in public recreation.¹⁶

Black visual images of sport during World War I and the early 1920s greatly ranged in tone depending on the periodical. Magazines like *Half-Century* published largely positive photos and drawings of baseball players and games. Posed pictures like the ones in the *Chicago Daily News* were common. These photographs, featuring a player in batting, pitching, or catching stance, accompanied laudatory articles celebrating the athletic achievements of the subject (Figure 3.5). Despite its location in the urban center of Chicago (or perhaps because of it), *Half-Century* published cover drawings that reinforced the mythical pastoral nature of baseball. The May-June 1923 cover, for example, depicted a young boy sitting at a fence, watching a baseball game through a knothole in the fence (Figure 3.6). Above the fence line, the hats of the various

¹⁴ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 201.

¹⁵ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 206-208.

¹⁶ The contest over leisure spaces during segregation was discussed in further depth in Chapter One.


Figure 3.5: Pete Hill, *Half-Century Magazine*

SPORTING NEWS

A PUGILISTIC VOICE FROM THE PAST

Boxing is a game full of thrills and science. It has suffered due to lax legislation or to the lack of proper safeguards about the game. The boxer's life is one of close observation and healthier atmosphere. A bitter dose of reality for the game Johnson made a fortune out of it. He was a man of and disgraced.

THE PASSING OF



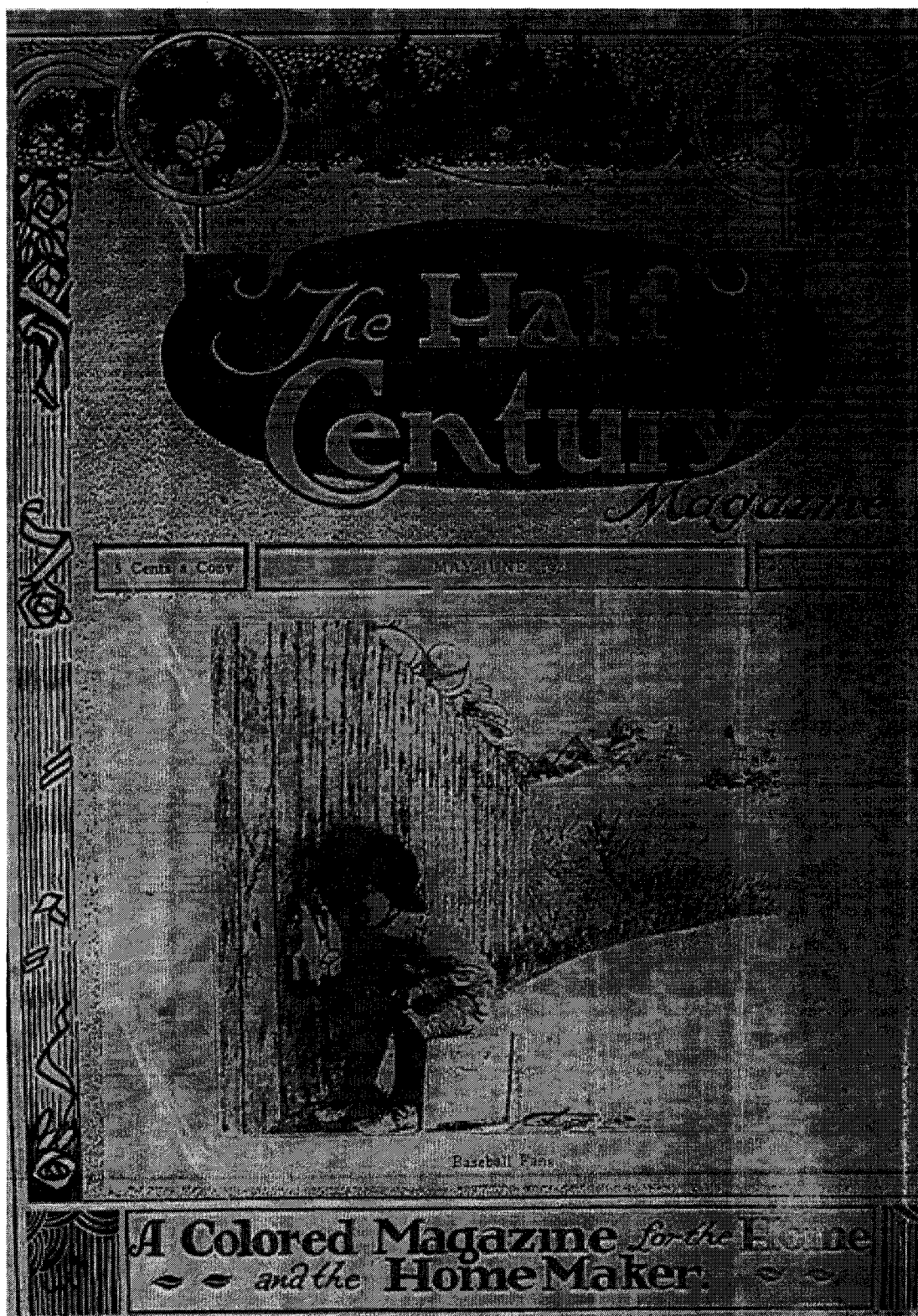
J. 'PETE' HILL

HOWARD P. DREW

FROM the war-weary zones of France comes the report that Howard P. Drew will compete at the track carnival to be held at Nice, France, on June 22nd. Fifty athletes are in training from all

flowers of sports
of the men and
The white oppo
ite sporting pro
n their endeavor
Johnson's measure
nson was in his
y hard won bat
est that could
world. He had
an, but sufficient
disadvantage regard
He had been
best fight of all
comparison
ored man made it
"white hope" had
In a flash with
ite man made the
y rounds had not
his ex-like attack
any that the white
ts of the fight re
around a mouse
skilled, clever and
have stalked for
ed fight. A voice
persecuted by the
have attempted to
covered the cord
r to him. "A fake
st can be mixed up
stoop to such low
f their mind which
the man who is
ature of those liv
make a confession
e he died.
truest sportsman
e played the game
was worth while, he
ropelessly why not
d conceal the dirty
e in the States
mer of the race who
ce of extraordinary
people's open minds
athletes. At Har
go classes could not
foremost authority
Johnson go through
other the but man
ask for lack of ca
man like him. Dr

Figure 3.6: Knothole Fan, *Half-Century Magazine*



various spectators were visible, while the background showed a rural setting for the game.

The editorial choice to romanticize baseball as a rural, gentrified event reflected *Half-Century's* focus on promoting respectability. *Half-Century* downplayed the masculinity of black men by featuring male black athletes only within the interior sporting pages.¹⁷ The young baseball fan on the cover was a non-threatening youth, while the baseball field itself was free of gamblers, hustlers, and the encroachment of urban settlements. Thus, the fence obscured the social baseball scene with which most Chicago baseball fans would have been familiar and the generic rural setting divorced Negro League baseball from its normal urban, industrial environs.

¹⁷ *Half-Century* did sometimes run covers with African American adult males. These pictures, however, generally featured black soldiers, who seemed less threatening to the black elite community due to their added legitimacy and authority as members of the military. Black soldiers, particularly during World War I, symbolized hope and promise for many African Americans. On the significance of black World War I soldiers, see Steven A. Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921" *Journal of American History* (March 1996): 1478-1504; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 331. Despite their general absence as cover models, black male athletes appeared within the pages of *Half-Century* with some frequency. In 1919, *Half-Century* began to include a section entitled "Sporting News." These one-page articles generally discussed a particular black athlete who had achieved national fame for his athletic achievements. Although these athletes came from a variety of sports, including football, baseball, basketball, boxing, and track and field, their photographic images shared a great number of commonalities. Photographs of the athletes often accompanied the text and depicted them dressed in proper uniform while assuming a serious pose and looking directly into the camera. In these photographs, the black athlete claimed additional authority through his association with organized sport and recognized teams.

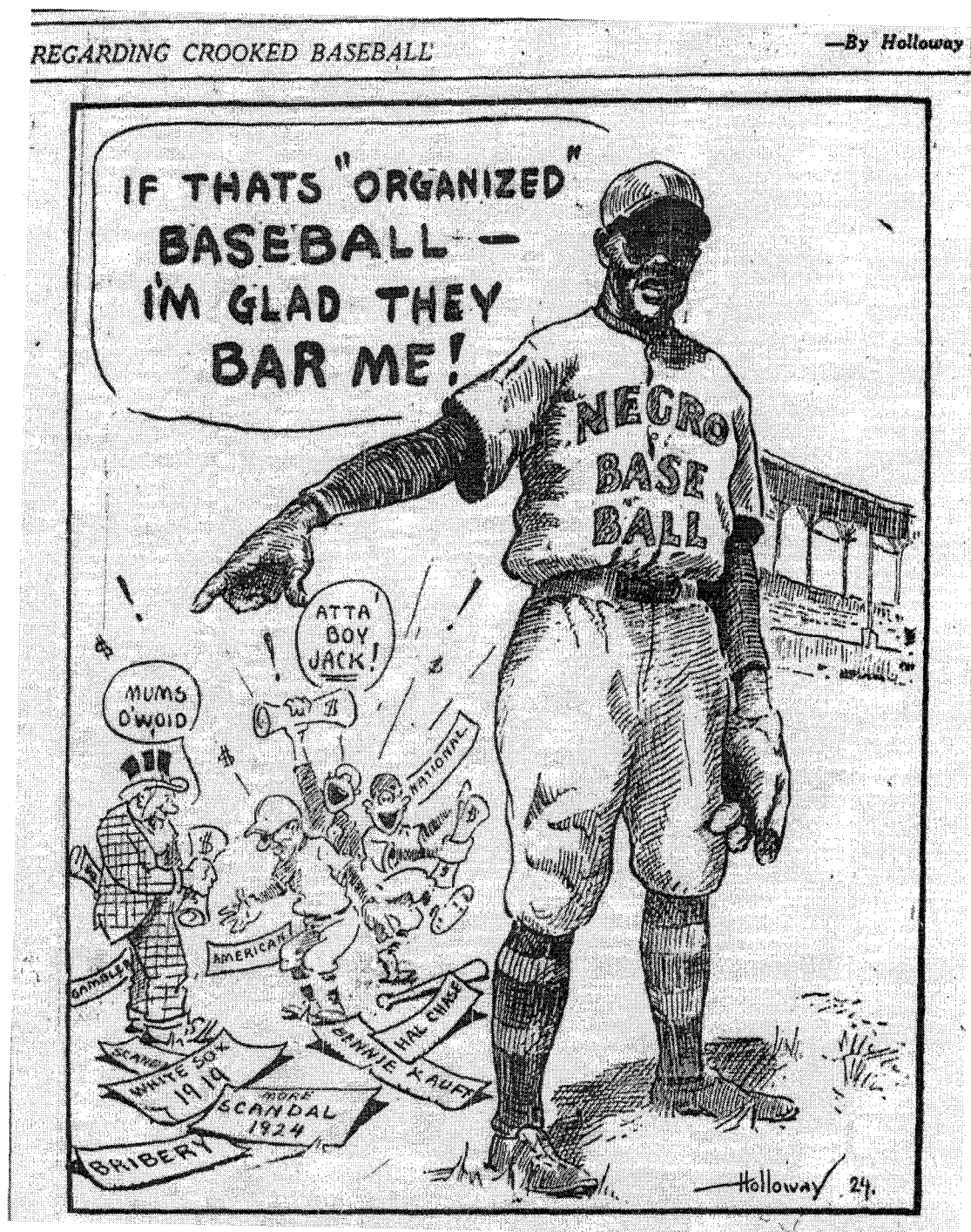
In contrast, the major black newspapers, like the *Courier* and *Defender*, used visual images not only to promote black baseball but also to challenge segregation and white supremacy. The *Pittsburgh Courier* published one of the more arresting images countering the racist arguments against the integration of the major leagues. In this editorial drawing, the central image is a depiction of a black baseball player in a “Negro Base Ball” uniform (Figure 3.7). The player points at smaller figures representing white baseball and signs saying “bribery,” “more scandal 1924,” “organized” baseball—I’m glad they bar me!”¹⁸

This image represented a strong counterargument to the prohibition on African American players in the major leagues. The small signs referenced white baseball’s embarrassing scandals. The “White Sox 1919” referred to the Black Sox scandal, in which eight Chicago White Sox were found to have accepted money in exchange for throwing games during the World Series.¹⁹ The Black Sox scandal resulted in the establishment of a major league baseball commissioner to maintain the integrity of the game. Kennesaw Mountain Landis vehemently yet unofficially opposed integration

¹⁸ “Regarding Crooked Baseball” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 October 1924.

¹⁹ Daniel Okrent and Harris Lewine, editors, *The Ultimate Baseball Book* (New York: Eisenbery, McCall, and Okrent, Inc., 1979, reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), 103-104; G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 86-115. On the context for and impact of the Black Sox Scandal, see Eliot Asinof, *Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963); Robert C. Cottrell, *Blackball, the Black Sox, and the Babe: Baseball’s Crucial 1920 Season* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002).

Figure 3.7: "Regarding Crooked Baseball" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 October 1924



during his long tenure as commissioner. Even under Landis's notorious iron grip, gambling scandals plagued the major leagues. The 1924 scandal, referenced in the cartoon, revolved around two members of the New York Giants, a player and a coach, who attempted to pay an opposing team's player to throw a game.²⁰

By referencing the scandal-plagued days of major league baseball, the artist clearly asserted the superior position of black baseball players. During a period when the term "organized" baseball referred only to white baseball and implied inferiority on the part of the Negro Leagues, the cartoon inverted the language. Thus, the black readership witnessed a reversal of terms and morality. Black baseball had not suffered the public humiliation of thrown games and therefore was superior to the "organized" game. Negro league players, therefore, were fortunate to be "barred" and spared an association with a tainted game. African Americans, frequently bombarded with admonitions to behave in a way consistent with racial pride and progress, had role models in black baseball stars who were metaphorically (and visually in the image) above the fray.

In the 1930s, as the Negro Leagues expanded and more teams began barnstorming through the country, black baseball gained wider attention in the white press. Depression-

²⁰ The 1924 scandal highlighted by the artist refers to a game-throwing scheme by New York Giants' Cozy Dolan, Jimmy O'Connell, and Phil Douglas. Hal Chase, one of the players mentioned, was involved in throwing numerous games through the 1910s and 1920s, White, *Creating the National Pastime*, 89-91. Bennie (Benny) Kauff, the other player included in the illustration, stole a car and was implicated in a gambling scandal. White, *Creating the National Pastime*, 89-91, 111-113. Members of the black press highlighted the moral shortcomings of the white major leagues in order to provide a counterargument to the assertion that the Negro Leagues were unorganized and black players lacked character. See Al Monroe, "What Say" *Chicago Defender*, 14 May 1932.

era owners, promoters, and sportswriters recognized the added significance of interracial games and lured fans anxious to see their race prevail on the field. Concurrent with this trend, white press coverage of the Negro Leagues increased. This coverage was often limited to short notices announcing an upcoming game or short recaps of previous competitions. Yet, at times, these white papers would include additional information about certain star players and their performances.²¹

Satchel Paige, the most famous of all Negro Leaguers in the 1930s and 1940s, often found himself as the subject of these articles and the accompanying visual images, which frequently played upon the racial stereotypes of the time. Quotes from players like Paige were printed in dialect rather than in proper English, in order to underscore both the southern origins of many of the players and the assumed inability of a black man to speak in any thing other than dialect.²² A Chicago article announcing Paige's appearance at White Sox Park portrayed Paige as a buffoon without intellect to match his physicality. Entitled "He's Just a Big Man From the South," the article referred to Paige as "Mistah

²¹ For a few examples of white press coverage of black and interracial baseball during the 1930s, see "Deans to Play at Dexter Park" *New York Times*, 10 October 1934; "Deans Play in Paterson," *New York Times*, 20 October 1934; "Twin Bill to Aid Charity," *New York Times*, 22 June 1938; "Crawfords Set Back Black Yankees," *New York Times*, 27 June 1938.

²² African American athletes still struggle with these stereotypes today. Sportswriters and broadcasters frequently praise particular black athletes as "articulate," implying that most black athletes lack eloquence. The same commentators rarely if ever remark upon the speaking abilities of white athletes. For a further discussion of racism in broadcasting in the last quarter of the twentieth century, see Phillip M. Hoose, *Necessities: Racial Barriers in American Sports* (New York: Random House, 1989); John M. Hoberman, *Darwin's Athlete: How Sports Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

Paige;" the other ballplayers in the story defer to the author as "suh;" and the author noted that Paige's athletic prowess, especially his pitching practice of "throwing baseballs at those stuffed cats at carnivals," had allowed him to keep "himself in cigars and his girl friends in kewpie dolls."²³ Throughout the article, the author, Bob Ray, described Paige as little more than an overgrown clown, who just happened to have a talent for baseball. In a further attempt to diminish Paige's importance or originality, Ray claimed that Paige's stunt of pulling in his outfielders before facing a batter "was a trick Rube Waddell made famous."²⁴ Ray thus contributed to the legend of Paige's ability by reprinting comments about his incredible speed. Moreover, he also solidified Paige's reputation among white observers as a "clown" and an entertainer who embraced both the Jim Crow system and racial stereotypes. Even though Ray's editorial noted that "Satchel is quite a pitcher and if it weren't for his color he'd be in the big leagues," the reporter's glorification of stereotypes and his unwillingness to actually fault the major leagues reflects a paternalistic attitude toward Paige and the Negro Leagues.²⁵ Moreover, his portrayal of Paige reinforced negative racial stereotypes that conceptualized black baseball as a diversion and white baseball as a truly skilled sport. Ray made no further judgments on the validity of the baseball color line, thus his praise of Paige as major league material comes across as an empty attempt to drum up publicity for the game advertised in the article.

²³ Bob Ray, "He's Just a Big Man From the South" Satchel Paige File, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (NBHFM), n.d.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In 1935, when Paige played for the North Dakota-based and interracial semiprofessional Bismarcks, the *Bismarck Tribune* devoted a great deal of press to Paige and his teammates. Interracial baseball in North Dakota had a short and intense period of success in the mid-1930s. In 1934, an integrated Jamestown, North Dakota semiprofessional team undertook a barnstorming circuit that included several games against a white team “that featured well-known white major leaguers Jimmie Foxx, Jimmy Dykes, and Tommy Bridges. “ The Jamestown club managed to win several of their contests against the barnstorming major leaguers. Inspired by their success, Neil Orr Churchill, owner of the rival semipro Bismarcks, lured Satchel Paige and a significant number of Jamestown’s black players to his club. With black stars like Paige and Ted Radcliffe as well as highly competent white semipro players, the 1935 Bismarcks drew large crowds and attracted national attention when they won the Denver Post semi-pro championship. Semipro fans, players, and owners recognized the Denver tournament as the ultimate test of a team’s quality.²⁶

In the 1930s, race relations in the upper Midwest were ambiguous. Residents readily welcomed black ball players and supported interracial baseball. Yet, seemingly without contradiction, local papers advertised Ku Klux Klan meetings in concert with interracial games.²⁷ This unease with aspects of integration would bring about the end of

²⁶ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 188, 191-192.

²⁷ Kyle P. McNary, *Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe: 36 Years of Pitching and Catching in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (Minneapolis: McNary Publishing, 1994), 30. Black hockey players in Quebec faced similar restrictions. Although a number of hockey teams were integrated, “Black players were told to leave the province if they fraternized with women in the white community.” William Humber, *Diamonds of the North: A Concise History of Baseball in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 139. Very little

integrated semipro baseball in North Dakota. After a successful 1935 season and alleged interracial romances between Paige and local white women, the North Dakotans started to turn against the players. According to Mark Ribowsky, “[c]heering Paige on the mound as his team went for the town’s first championship of any kind was one thing; offering up their daughters to a black man’s bed was another.”²⁸ Shortly after the accusations of illicit romances, Paige fled North Dakota and joined the Kansas City Monarchs.²⁹

Toward the end of Paige’s tenure in Bismarck, the *Tribune* printed a cartoon illustration announcing that Paige had signed with the Kansas City Monarchs. The illustration printed in the paper seized upon numerous racial stereotypes and derogatory racial images (see Figure 3.8).³⁰ Accompanying the large rendering of Paige’s face (which exaggerated the size of his lips) are four smaller pictures meant to portray Paige’s athletic abilities and his pitching position. The smaller illustrations portray African

work has been done on the experience of black athletes in the upper Midwest. Steven R. Hoffbeck has collected a series of short pieces on Minnesota and black baseball, but they are mainly descriptive pieces about individual players or events and provide little context or analysis. Hoffbeck, ed., *Swinging for the Fences: Black Baseball in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005). Black American baseball players competing on barnstorming tours in the Canadian Maritime provinces encountered similar tensions. The black touring teams were popular with Maritime residents, yet “in order to attract fans, they often had to cultivate an image of ‘otherness’ that played upon white racial theories about the different characteristics of the races.” Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 173.

²⁸ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 192.

²⁹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 192-193; Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 126-133.

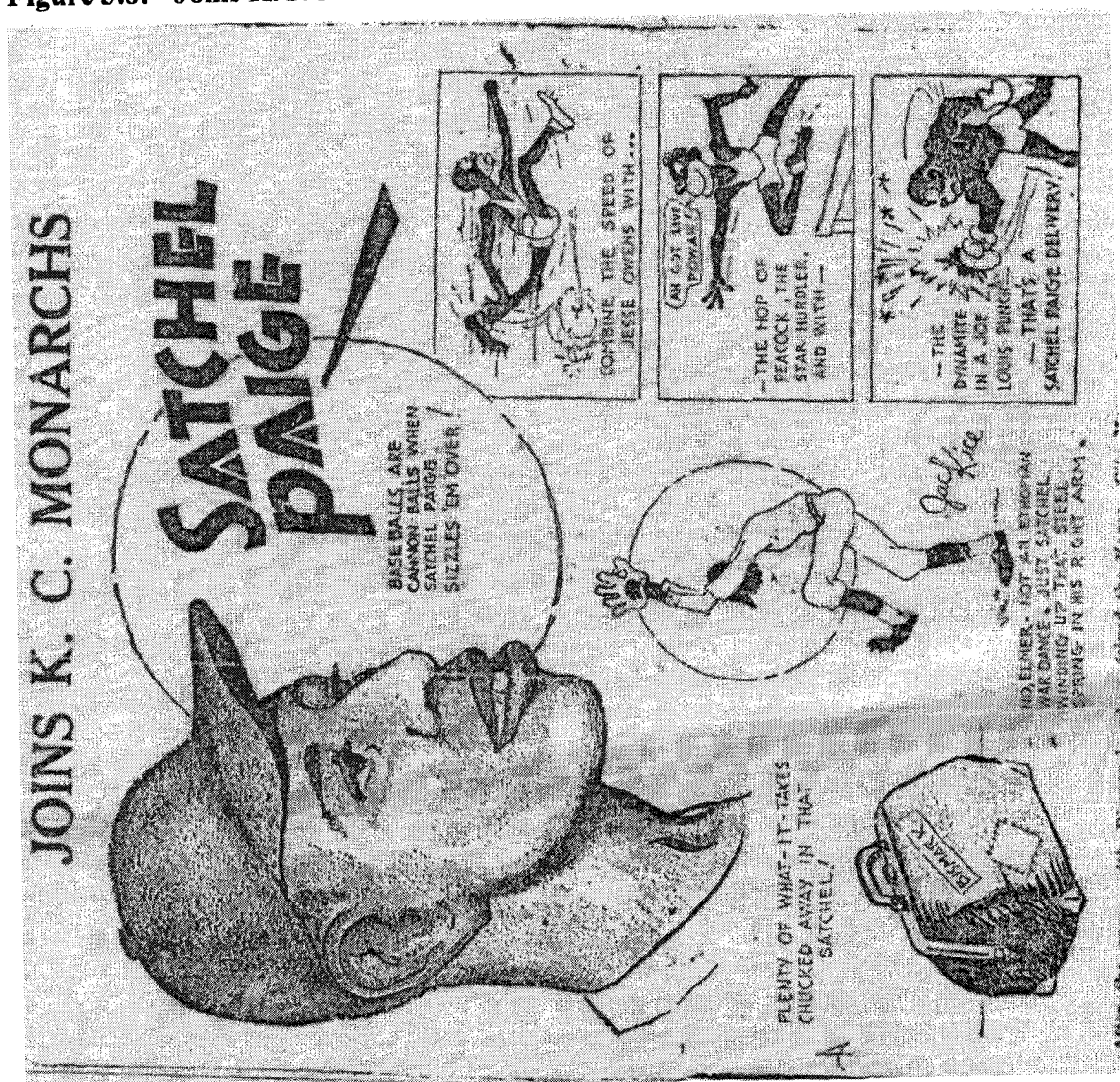
³⁰ “Joins K.C. Monarchs” *Bismarck Tribune*, 28 August 1935.

American men in an animalistic mode. In particular, the rendering of the black boxer that describes Paige's delivery as possessing the "dynamite in a Joe Louis Punch" depicted a black man who resembles a gorilla more than a man. This illustration exaggerated the torso and minimized any facial expression. Similarly, the depictions of the track stars (Jesse Owens and a hurdler) were elongated and devoid of facial features. The smaller drawing of Paige himself obscured all but the contrast between the blackness of his skin and the white of his uniform. The caption on this drawing cautioned "no Elmer, not an Ethiopian War Dance- just Satchel Paige winding up" and prompted the reader to associate Paige as an exotic native African tied to strange tribal traditions, rather than as an accomplished African American man and athlete. These images and accompanying text diminished Paige's success by questioning his claim to be a skilled and trained athlete.

Skill was an important commodity within black baseball. All of the stakeholders for black baseball benefited from the skilled performance of black baseball. The black elite and black press used the public display of skill in the Negro Leagues to push for increased recognition of racial success and to lobby for integration while Negro League owners highlighted the skill of their players in order to sell more tickets and fill the stadiums.³¹ The *Chicago Defender* published a series of illustrations by George Lee that

³¹ "National Negro League is Alright: Our Baseball Players Rank as High as Others" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 March 1930; W. Rollo Wilson, "Eastern Snapshots" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 September 1925; Wilson, "Sports Shots" *Pittsburgh Courier* 4 March 1933; Chester L. Washington, "Sez Ches" *Pittsburgh Courier* 18 May 1940.

Figure 3.8: "Joins K.C. Monarchs" *Bismarck Tribune*, August 28, 1935.



emphasized the skill and accomplishments of black baseball players.³² (See Figures 3.9 and 3.10 for examples) For the players themselves, attaining the label of “skilled” athlete reinforced their claim to manhood. A number of players noted with some pleasure that baseball success was predicated on skill and a keen mind for strategy.³³ As Bill Foster recalled, “It was a long time before they found out that he [the black athlete] could actually think technically. They thought we could think just generally, but they didn’t think we could think things out in detail. They didn’t think we could thing and remember a set of signals.”³⁴ Success in baseball, a sport that emphasized strategy, refuted the idea that black athletes succeeded only through “brute strength.”³⁵

Thus, the stereotypical images of African American athletes as buffoons were all the more distressing to black advocates of sport. Two of the more well-known white New York baseball writers, Dan Parker and Jimmy Powers, repeatedly employed derogatory imagery. Caricatured illustrations of African Americans in sport frequently accompanied Powers’s and Parker’s columns, sending an unmistakable message to their readers. These illustrations echoed Currier and Ives’s *Darktown Comics* in tone and

³² George Lee, “Sporting Around” *Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1934, 21 April 1934, 12 May 1934, 16 June 1934, 21 July 1934.

³³ In an era when racially-biased intelligence testing was used by eugenicists to prove black racial inferiority, a black athlete’s intellectual prowess challenged the prevailing stereotype. On the racial bias of intelligence testing, see Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 1995), 83.

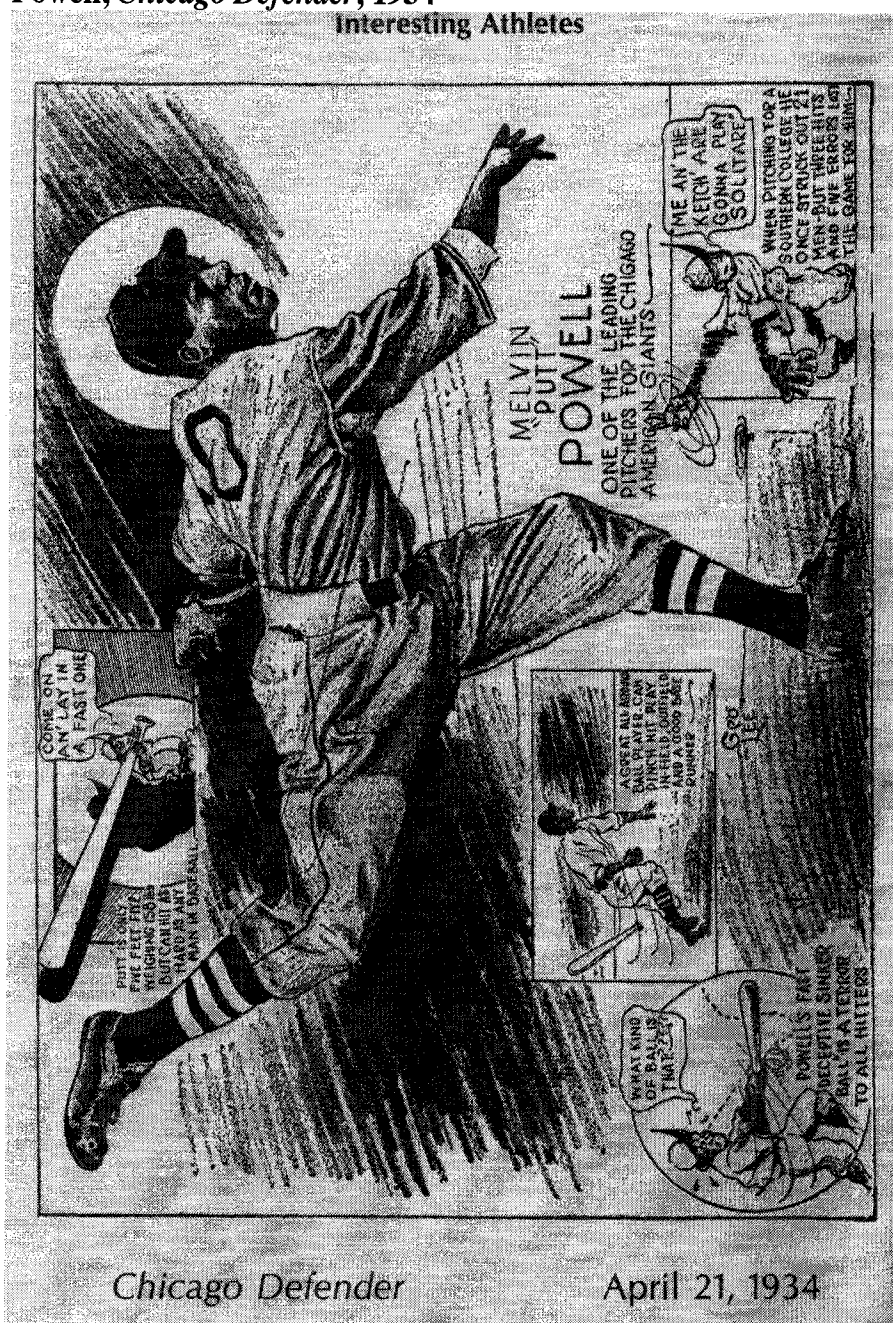
³⁴ Foster, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 201.

³⁵ Page, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 149.

Figure 3.9: George Lee, Sporting Around, Editorial Art Featuring David Malarcher, *Chicago Defender*, 1934.



Figure 3.10: George Lee, "Sporting Around," Editorial Art featuring Melvin Powell, *Chicago Defender*, 1934



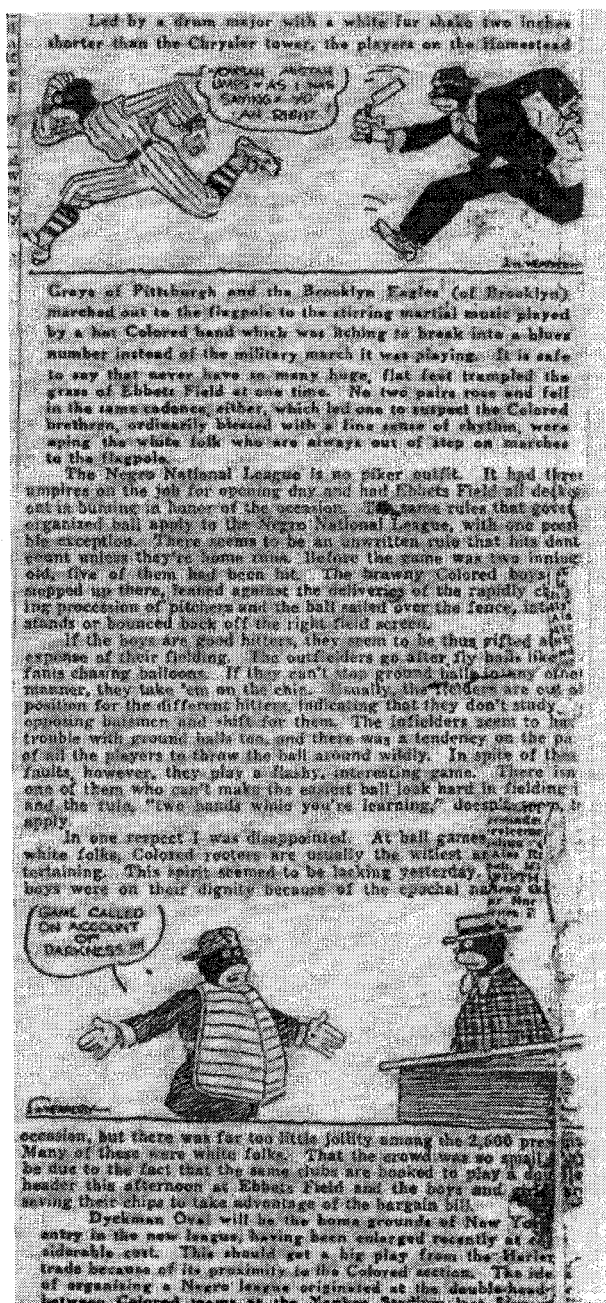
racial insensitivity.³⁶ The artists portrayed both players and umpires as incompetent and drew the subjects as dark and animalistic (Figure 3.11). The captions and the dialogue in the cartoons used dialect and played upon racial puns. In one cartoon included in a Parker column, the umpire declared to a fan that the game “was called on account of darkness.” This text referenced an older, racial joke.³⁷ Within the column itself, Parker compared Negro League outfielders to “infants chasing balloons.” Parker also made disparaging comments about the fans and the marching band, comments that seized upon popular racial stereotypes of the time. Parker described the band members as having “huge, flat feet” and argued that the band wanted to play the “blues” rather than the traditional march they performed. Later, Parker took the fans to task for a lack of “jollity” and attributed the sedate nature of the crowd to the number of white people in attendance.³⁸

³⁶ Dan Parker, “Ebbets Field Goes High Yellow” *Brooklyn Times Union*, 19 May 1935; Jimmy Powers “The Powerhouse” *New York Daily News*, 4 February 1935. Similar depictions appeared in other contemporary comics. In the first half of the twentieth century, cartoonists capitalized on derogatory stereotypes, such as “sambo,” “mammy,” “savages,” and “pickaninny” in their portrayal of African American characters. On blacks in the comics and the most common stereotypes, see Fredrik Strömberg, *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History* (Fantagraphics Books, 2003), 29-30.

³⁷ In 1916, a New York-based magazine called *The Independent* included the joke in a humor column, reprinting it from *Harper's Weekly*. This version of the joke was even more problematic and mean-spirited as it was told at the expense of an elderly African American woman. “The boys of Wallace University Schools were playing baseball on an empty lot in Nashville, Tennessee, when the game was interrupted by an old negro woman crossing the lot, and a small boy called out, ‘Game called on account of darkness.’” “Pebbles” *The Independent* 87, July 10, 1916, 64.

³⁸ Dan Parker, “Ebbets Field Goes High Yellow” *Brooklyn Times Union*, 19 May 1935.

Figure 3.11: Dan Parker, "Ebbets Field Goes High Yellow" *Brooklyn Times Union*, 19 May 1935.



Despite their use of derogatory images and language, Powers and Parker approved of racial integration of the major leagues. Parker publicly called for the breaking of the color line as early as 1933 in response to a *Pittsburgh Courier* inquiry. According to Parker, "I don't see why the mere accident of birth should prove a bar to Negro baseball players who aspire to places in organized baseball."³⁹ The 1935 illustrations in his column demonstrate that even supportive members of the white press saw no harm in publishing stereotypical images of African Americans. Moreover, Parker concluded his 1933 letter by stating his fear that integration might cause the Yankees to "lose their great mascot... 'Bojangles' Robinson," patronizingly reasserting an African American stars subordinate role in white society.⁴⁰

Similarly, Powers also published his column from 1935-1957, during the very time when desegregation was the crucial issue facing both white and black baseball. Powers also, in at least once instance, supported the integration of the white major leagues. The *Defender*, in a note preceding a reprint of a Powers' column, compared him to William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown and praised "his campaign for admittance of Race baseball players into the big leagues."⁴¹ In 1936, he published a question and answer In addition to the cartoons embedded in his column, Powers voiced negative

³⁹ Dan Parker, "Major Club Owners Who Welcome Negro Patrons Shouldn't Bar Players" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 March 1933.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ "White Sports Writer, Backed by N.Y. Daily, Fights For Race Players In Major Leagues!" *Chicago Defender*, 15 August 1936.

opinions about black athletes in general.⁴² In a 1946 "Sports Beat" column, Wendell Smith noted Powers' continued objection to integrated baseball as well as his dislike of Branch Rickey due to Rickey's decision to "break up the lily-white policy of organized baseball."⁴³ The similarities between Powers's and Parker's racist visual images underscores the pervasiveness of racial stereotypes in the 1930s.

The black press countered the offensive images published by the white media through its use of editorial art.⁴⁴ The black press published caricatures that challenged the stereotyped images of African Americans as minstrel-like characters. In contrast to the depictions of Satchel Paige, Joe Louis, and Jesse Owens published by the Bismarck, North Dakota paper (Figure 3.8), papers such as the *Baltimore Afro-American* presented

⁴² Powers saved his particularly virulent attacks for Joe Louis, calling the boxing champion "a vain kid, or dumb" and referring to a 1939 Louis fight as a "pre-conceived pig-sticking" event. "Fight Films Cost Joe Louis Victory, Says Blackburn" *Baltimore Afro-American*, 11 July 1938; Bennie Butler, "Power's Tirade on Joe Louis Protested" *Baltimore Afro-American*, 15 July 1939.

⁴³ Wendell Smith, "The Sports Beat" *Pittsburgh Courier* 10 August, 1946. Smith also reported on a racially-offensive skit performed by New York sportswriters. In this skit, Jackie Robinson was portrayed as a butler and white baseball commissioner Happy Chandler was Robinson's "massa." Smith, "The Sports Beat: All Sportswriters Aren't Liberal or Fair" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 February 1946.

⁴⁴ These images do not rely on panels or storytelling and thus are more akin to political cartoons than to comic strips. At the same time, a number of these drawings instruct or describe instead of providing a satiric look at a current event. Frequently these illustrations often utilize a much more realist style of art than their cartoon counterparts although the artists sometimes combined realistic sketches with smaller comic drawings in the same panel. (For an example, see Figures 3.9 and 3.10) As such, the most appropriate and general descriptor for these works is editorial art. For more examples of contemporary comic depictions of Africans and African Americans, see Stromberg, *Black Images in the Comics*, particularly 48-55, 58-59, 64-67, 96-97.

dignified photographs and artistic renderings of black athletes. The sporting cartoons celebrated the achievements of African American sport celebrities. In instances when these images were critical of black sport, they attacked the infighting among Negro League owners rather than individual players. In other critical pieces, the artist cautioned fans to exercise restraint after important victories by African American athletes in order to prevent racial riots.

Photographers of the Homestead Grays and Satchel Paige presented their subjects in a dignified manner. These photographs clearly contradict and challenge the more prevalent comic illustrations of black athletes as popularized in the *Darktown Comics* and comic strips like *Felix the Cat*.⁴⁵ A 1938 photo of the Grays featured the team members in alignment, dressed in clean, matching uniforms under the headline “Here They Are! Baseball’s Kings of Swat!” (Figure 3.12). Individual portraits took a similar approach, with the player either in a subdued motion or standing still looking into the camera. The headline typically proclaimed the outstanding athletic ability of the man in question and the caption below provided further information about the individual’s background and accomplishments.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For comparison, see Figures 3.1 and 3.2. For a representative strip of Felix the Cat, see Stromberg, *Black Images in the Comics*, 58-59.

⁴⁶ “Speed is His Middle Name” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 7 May 1932; “Signs---Storm Center----All Set” *Pittsburgh Courier* 6 February 1932; “May Start” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 April 1931; “Will They be in Hero Roles Again This Year?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 September 1925; “New Addition to Rube Foster’s Pitching Staff,” *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1921; “The Babe Ruth of the National League,” *Chicago Defender*, 9 July 1921; “Ranks with the Best,” *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1932.

Figure 3.12 *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 16, 1938



The editorial art featured in the sporting pages of the black press underscored the important accomplishments and abilities of men like Joe Louis. The artists used a more naturalistic approach in some cases, attempting to accurately capture the subject. In addition, these images also communicated what the black press believed were important messages about conduct. With the memory of the riots that followed Jack Johnson's victory over Jim Jeffries still fresh, black periodicals warned their readership to avoid any confrontations after Louis's 1937 title bout against James Braddock (Figure 3.13).⁴⁷

Similarly, two 1937 cartoons in the *Baltimore Afro-American* poked fun at the administrative and contract difficulties in the Negro Leagues. Because the Leagues were frequently in flux and the owners were often at odds over the best way to run the league, Negro League politics provided an easy target for a sports-minded humorist. Even as the artist takes aim at the mismanagement of the Negro National and American Leagues and the willingness of black athletes to seek their fortune elsewhere, the figures were mostly devoid of stereotypical features. In Figure 3.14, the players, though sketched rather crudely, did not reflect any of the animalistic or minstrel-like characteristics of the *Darktown Comics* or the North Dakota-Paige cartoon. "Money Shouts Even When it Whispers So Soft and Low" (Figure 3.15) also relied on quick sketch type images. In this figure, the players once again escaped visual denigration, while the artist showed the owners in a more negative light (in this case as a large angry man with exaggerated

⁴⁷ Louis won the heavyweight title as a result of his defeat of Braddock in 1937. Richard Bak, *Joe Louis: The Great Black Hope* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 132, 149.

Figure 3.13 *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 19, 1937

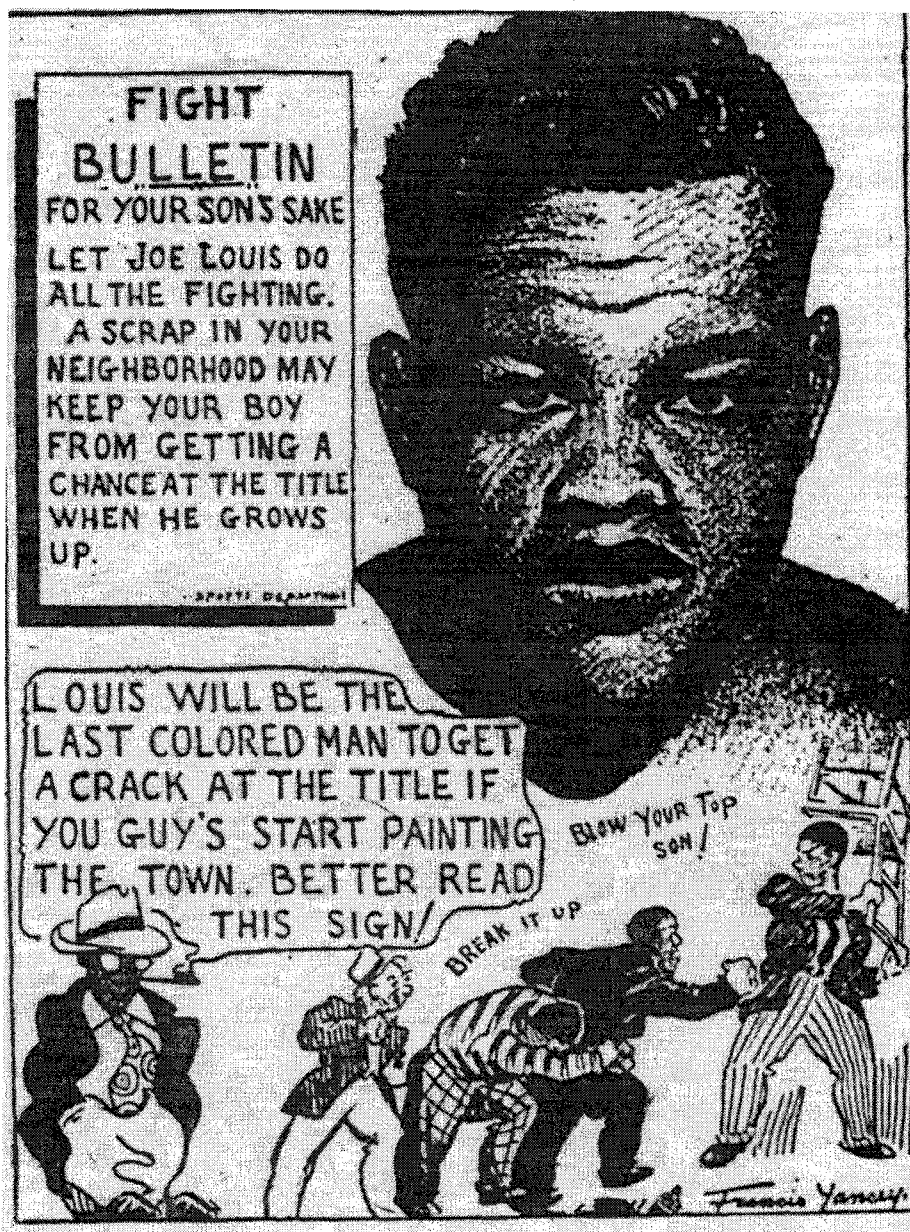


Figure 3.14 *Baltimore Afro-American* July 17, 1937



Figure 3.15 *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 12, 1937



features). On the other hand, the cartoonist was content to depict the “Santo Domingo” owner as a stereotype of a wealthy Hispanic-Caribbean man.⁴⁸

African American depictions of Negro League players were not always positive and celebratory. In some instances, artists reflected on the inherent vulnerability of black sporting stars. As a result of fears about black male sexuality fueled by the legal woes of Jack Johnson, stars like Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, and Jesse Owens, as well as most Negro League players, were strongly encouraged to marry young and avoid public relationships with white women.⁴⁹ The black sporting press and public were especially concerned about the perceptions of black athletes. A piece of editorial art in the *Baltimore Afro-American* captured the precarious status of black sport stars (Figure 3.16). Athletes like Jesse Owens and Eulace Peacock stood on King’s Row waiting to welcome Joe Louis, who was climbing the steep and winding path to black celebrity. The blackball champions, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, followed Louis. At the bottom, just beginning his journey on the “comeback trail,” was boxer Kid Chocolate. Notably, the artist depicted Jack Johnson on the side, sliding down the hill to disgrace, having fallen from King’s Row. Owens remarked to Louis, “If you think it’s hard to get up here Joe.

⁴⁸ Black sportswriters generally spoke of Latino ballplayers in favorable terms, viewing them as fellow victims of Jim Crow. Yet, in some instances, black writers employed racialized language to differentiate African American players from those of Hispanic-descent. For example, a *Chicago Defender* argument describes the players on the Cuban Stars as “little brown men” and singles out one of the Stars’ pitchers by calling him a “cool little islander.” “Flint Majors Drop Two to the Cubans” *Chicago Defender*, 28 May 1930.

⁴⁹ Joe Louis with Edna and Art Rust Jr. *Joe Louis: My Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 39.

Figure 3.16: *Baltimore Afro-American*, 10 July 1937.



Wait'll you see how tough it is to stay up here." In this illustration, the artist underscored the competing demands African American athletes faced as well as their vulnerability to outside forces and temptations.

Other images in black newspapers capitalized on the stereotypes about African Americans that were very common during this time period. One of the most intriguing aspects of this trend is the way in which black baseball (rather than the white press) also implemented similar images to promote games and increase attendance. Although the use of racial stereotypes was not widespread within most of organized Negro League baseball, a number of teams throughout the black ball era utilized such imagery.⁵⁰

The publicity methods of so-called "clowning" teams were controversial. A number of sportswriters, black baseball players, and Negro League officials argued that these teams and the images (both their advertisements and their public appearances in costume) they portrayed were detrimental to the ultimate goals of establishing a profitable, black-owned baseball league and the desegregation of major league baseball.⁵¹ Yet, these teams drew large crowds during barnstorming tours and their profitability made them valuable commodities for black baseball.

⁵⁰ These teams, generally thought of as clowning teams, were always a minority in the black game. Thanks to the popular novel and movie, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Star and Motor-Kings*, it is their image that comes to mind for many when the Negro Leagues are discussed. See William J. Brashler, *Bingo Long* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973, 1993).

⁵¹ The Pittsburgh Courier did applaud early teams such as the "Bellevue Clowns" for "play[ing] straight up-to-the-minute ball." "They'll Furnish Comedy and Class Against Grays Saturday" *Pittsburgh Courier* 29 August 1925. In the 1930s and 1940s, as the black press amped up the push for integration and black leaders began to push integration over black enterprise, clowning teams lost the goodwill of the black press.

Many of the clown teams played on racial and national stereotypes related to Africans. The Zulu Cannibal Giants, for instance, competed in grass skirts and donned war paint prior to games. The Cannibal Giants also featured players chanting and performing dances during lulls within the baseball action. Advertisements for upcoming Cannibal Giants games used images that strongly focused on the supposed Africanness of the players rather than highlighting their baseball prowess (Figure 3.17). The broadside poster's central image was that of the team logo (a globe centering on Africa) and four painted Giants in long grass skirts. Another advertisement for the team played on the same themes. This latter ad showed the players in full makeup, costume, and barefoot (Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19). Moreover, the ad proclaims that the team was the "Oddest Novelty in Baseball," an appeal to customers seeking unique entertainment.

The choice to use African imagery in naming and promoting the Zulu Cannibal Giants was not accidental. Team owner and promoter, Syd Pollock and Abe Saperstein respectively, capitalized on two prominent aspects of contemporary African-American popular culture.⁵² First, the increasing attention to the situation in Ethiopia over sovereignty and the growing pan-Africanism among black civil rights advocates of the

⁵² Abe Saperstein was a strong presence in Negro League baseball. A white businessman, Saperstein arranged many of the bookings for black baseball teams and at times, held a monopoly on the bookings for sought-after sites. Saperstein was also responsible for creating the Harlem Globetrotters, the clowning black basketball team. He also used his connections to cross-promote with his athletes and teams. Goose Tatum played for both the Indianapolis Clowns and the Harlem Globetrotters and Satchel Paige made promotional appearances for the Globetrotters. Othello Renfroe, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 340-341.

Figure 3.17: Broadside from 1943 advertising Zulu Cannibal

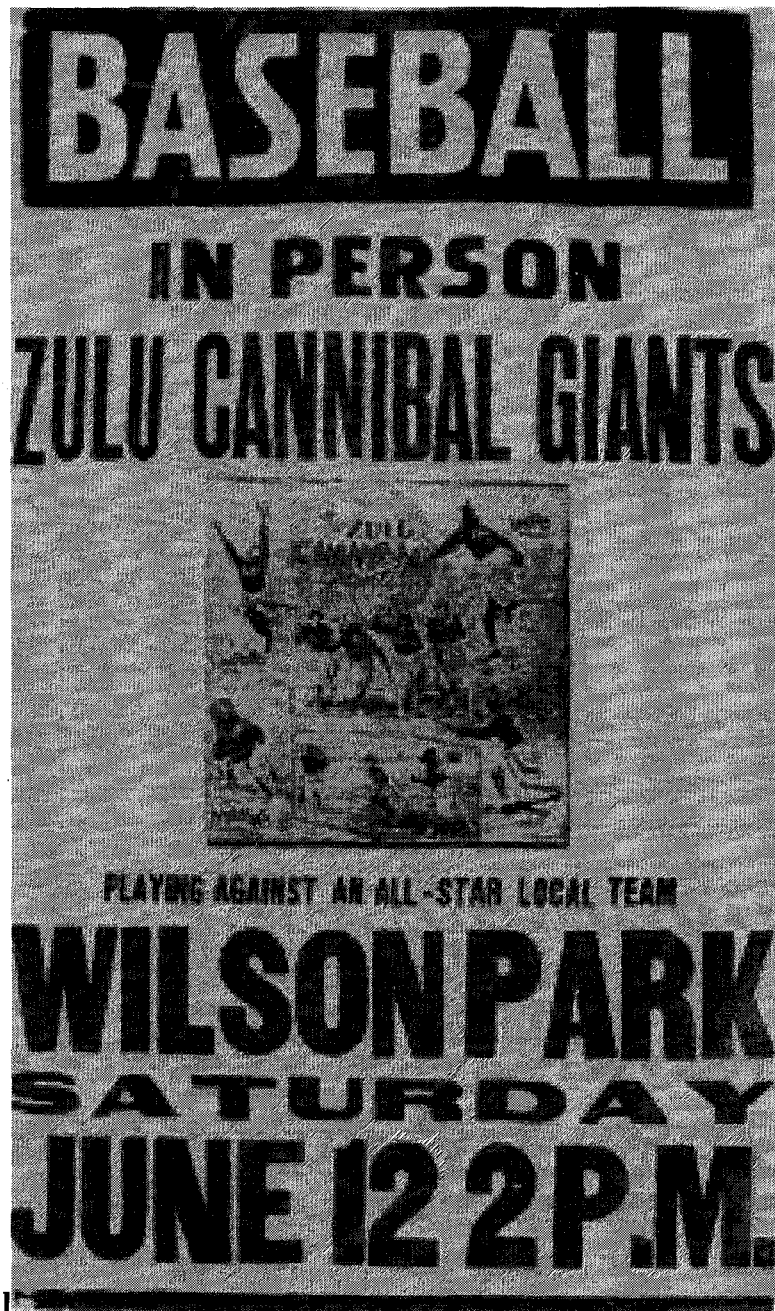


Figure 3.18: Zulu Cannibal Giants

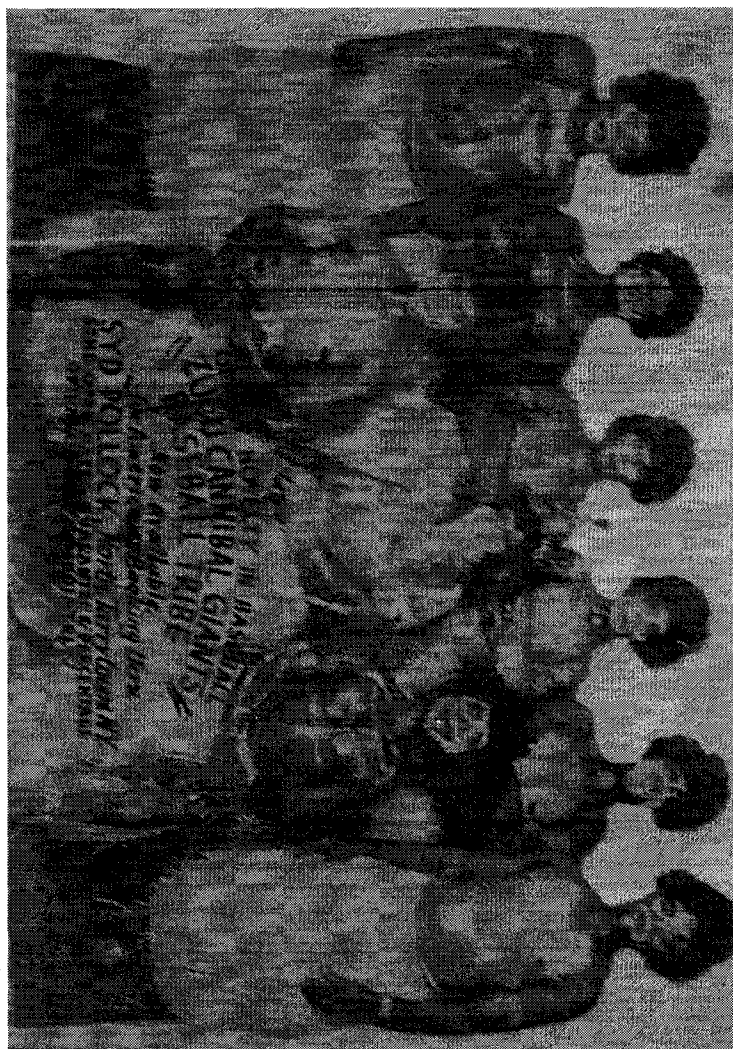
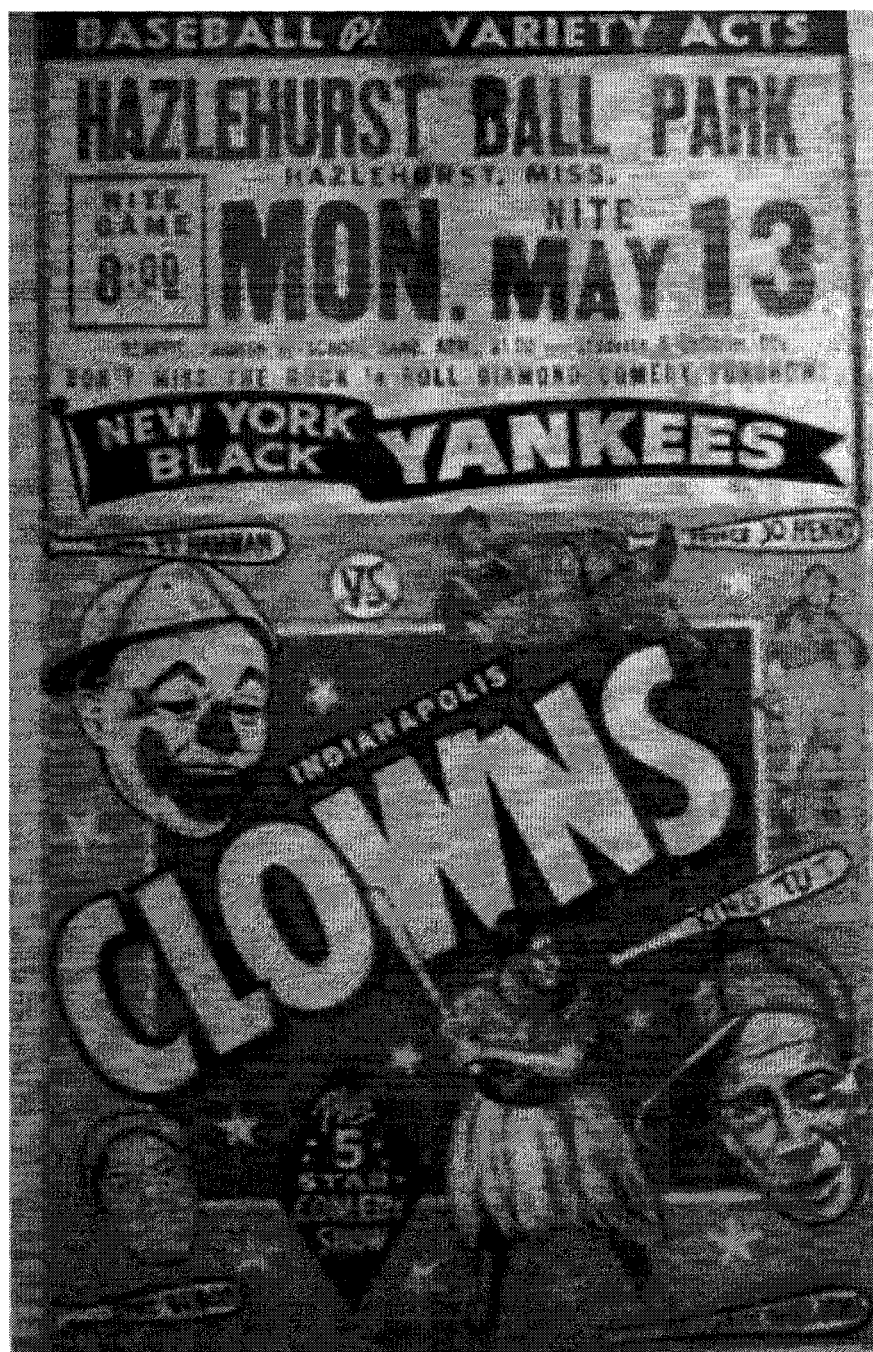


Figure 3.19 : Individual photograph of a Zulu ball player, note the grass skirt and war paint.



Figure 3.20: Indianapolis Clowns broadside



time ensured a degree of name recognition and potentially a positive association within the black community.⁵³ Indeed, New Negro intellectual Alain Locke promoted the adoption of an African aesthetic for Harlem Renaissance era artists.⁵⁴ Moreover, “Giants” had a positive connotation among African American baseball fans.⁵⁵ The Cannibal Giants were also part of a larger trend of late 1930s media imagery and advertising that reasserted and propagated derogatory racial imagery that depicted blacks as cannibals and animal-like while highlighting the African origins of American blacks.⁵⁶

⁵³ In the twentieth century, diverse African American leaders such as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois advocated a pan-Africanist worldview. Although Garvey and Du Bois disagreed upon the degree to which African nations should gain autonomy and the importance of black American repatriation, they both publicly promoted the idea that African Americans should promote African self-rule. David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 60-78, 114, 119-120. These early calls for Pan-Africanism, particularly Garvey’s popular movement, laid the groundwork for a further expansion of political pan-Africanism. In the 1930s, Mussolini’s takeover of Ethiopia energized black members of the Communist party who (thanks in part to Garvey’s Back to Africa campaign) saw Ethiopia as a symbolic homeland for African Americans. Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 448-457. Stymied by an uncooperative U.S. government and therefore unable to join the fighting, a number of black communists (over 80) formed the Lincoln Brigade—a group that battled fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994, 1996), 123-158.

⁵⁴ Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 82-89.

⁵⁵ This association will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁶ Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), xix.

The 1933 World's Fair in Chicago likewise marketed attractions that claimed to present traditional Africans performing native acts. In reality, much like the Zulus, the performers were local, urban blacks hired to pose as native Africans.⁵⁷ Thus, the Zulu Cannibal Giants communicated contradictory messages in order to attract two diverse audiences. By playing on the popular advertising imagery of the late 1930s, the Zulu Cannibal Giants drew white crowds by reinforcing the contemporary racial stereotypes. Meanwhile, the Giants appealed to black fans through their association with an African heritage and their allusion to the great Negro League "Giants" teams.

The Cannibal Giants were not alone in black baseball clowning, or in drawing connections to stereotyped African imagery.⁵⁸ The Indianapolis Clowns, the most prominent clowning team in the immediate pre- and post-segregation era, also barnstormed throughout the country as a traveling clown team. The Clowns were known as the "Ethiopian Clowns" during the 1930s and 1940s, the height of pan-African concern over the European imperialism in Africa. Once again, Syd Pollock was responsible for the creation of this black ball clowning team. The Clowns appropriated characters from

⁵⁷ Philip McGowan, *American Carnival: Seeing and Reading American Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 67.

⁵⁸ Outside of the black sporting world, other African American entertainers capitalized on similarly stereotyped African imagery to win audiences. Notably, Josephine Baker performed exotic, African themed shows in Paris. See Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War" *Journal of American History* 81 (1994), 545; Michel Fabre, "International Beacons of African-American memory: Alexandre Dumas pere, "Henry O. Tanner, and Josephine Baker as Examples of Recognition" in Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 127-129.

the Cannibal Giants and other plays on Africa, minstrel shows, and the circus as part of their marketing schemes. Contemporary advertising posters show the wide variety of characters included on the Clowns (Figure 3.20). The poster names “King Tut” as one of its featured players. Moreover, different players embodied various stereotypes. One of the larger images shows a man dressed as a tribal member, complete with grass skirt. Another illustration features a ballplayer made up to look like a circus clown, while at the top of the poster, yet another ballplayer is depicted as the stereotypical dandy minstrel character. At games, the players would perform various comedic sketches to entertain the crowd, again using the stock characters to amuse fans.⁵⁹

The Clowns would outlast the integration of major league baseball, continuing to barnstorm until 1965, performing a Harlem Globetrotters-like show in front of integrated audiences.⁶⁰ In fact, they outlasted the dissolution of the Negro American League. Although they never abandoned the comedy routines that marked their founding and the other similar clown teams, the Clowns were responsible for fostering one of the great African American baseball talents of the post-Jackie Robinson Era. Home run king, Hank Aaron spent his formative years touring with the Clowns. Under the stage name

⁵⁹ The Clowns were part of a long Negro League tradition that combined minstrelry and baseball. In the 1910s and 1920s, black ball teams would tour with a minstrel show company and both groups would provide entertainment during their stops. Bruce, *Kansas City Monarchs*, 80; Buck Leonard with James A. Riley, *Buck Leonard The Black Lou Gehrig: The Hall of Famer's Story in His Own Words* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc, 1995), 6.

⁶⁰ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 302. With the exception of the Clowns, the other remaining Negro League teams functioned as a minor league for the majors during the 1950s. Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 299-302.

“Pork Chops,” Hank Aaron competed with the Clowns until 1953, when Pollock sold Aaron’s option to the Milwaukee Braves.⁶¹ That same year, the Clowns made history by adding a female player, Toni Stone, to their team.⁶² In part due to their many publicity stunts and in part due to their actual athletic prowess, the Clowns were the last of the Negro League teams. The Clowns survived until 1960 trading on their status as a novelty act to attract crowds as they traveled the country.

The presence and popularity of the black clowning team reflects the racial atmosphere of the time, particularly in terms of popular culture and entertainment. For many African Americans in the entertainment business, racial expectations of the time shaped the way they could craft their public images. African American performers navigated the fine line between making strides in traditional white arenas through their presence and avoiding the racial stereotypes and caricatures that undergirded their inclusion in white entertainment. Much like the black actors who only found opportunities portraying “mammies” or “sambos,” black baseball players often found their most lucrative employment and acceptance by whites as members of clowning teams that played upon the tropes of minstrelry. The clowning players faced the difficult task of maintaining their own values and integrity while pursuing a profitable living. Many players who became involved with such teams came to terms with the

⁶¹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 312.

⁶² Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 204; James A. Riley, *The Negro Leagues* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1997), 90. Stone was later traded to the Kansas City Monarchs and retired in 1954. The Clowns, however, continued to employ female players on the teams for a few years. Connie Morgan and Mamie Johnson also competed with the Clowns in the mid-1950s.

contradictions between their private beliefs and their public act by arguing that they were only benefiting from the narrow-mindedness of white Americans, a narrow mindedness that was unlikely to change in Jim Crow America.⁶³

Under this reasoning, the clowning players were able to justify their participation in the often embarrassing actions that were part of barnstorming as black baseball clowns. These players felt that they were playing the role of trickster.⁶⁴ As tricksters, they were the ones who were actually in control and they were taking advantage of their white audiences, who played the role of the easily duped fools. The black trickster player was thus financially benefiting from the racial prejudice and stupidity of the white fans, earning a degree of power over the very people who usually held financial control within society. For these players, the joke was on their white audience, rather than on themselves. Even if they had to play a racial caricature, they ultimately profited from it as their white audience walked away from the performance with lighter pockets. Moreover, the trickster players performed what was merely a farce, they were able to

⁶³ A number of players expressed their belief that as performers in clowning performances, they in fact had the upper hand over their white audiences. Satchel Paige and Judy Johnson, interviews by Stephen Banker, *Black Diamonds*; Bruce Chadwick, *When the Game was Black and White: The Illustrated History of the Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 96; Othello Renfroe, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 340-341.

⁶⁴ I will discuss the importance of the trickster in black baseball folklore in further detail in Chapter Four.

protect themselves in a certain sense, by refusing to reveal too much to the whites that came to watch them play.⁶⁵

Although some African American ballplayers were able to come to terms with their participation on clowning teams and see themselves as the ultimate benefactors of an unfair racial system, other Negro League players and owners objected to the clown teams and their antics. Additionally, many of the more prominent black sportswriters found clown baseball to be antithetical to the goal of integrating major league baseball. In response to particular skits performed by the Ethiopian Clowns, for example, Negro League officials banned league teams from playing against the Clowns in 1942. Both of the skits that were considered objectionable involved scatological humor and Negro League officials were unwilling to have their league associated with what they considered unseemly humor.⁶⁶ This prohibition against scheduling games with the Clowns led to a brief cessation of their clowning routines. In 1943, the Clowns agreed to join the Negro League on the condition that they would refrain from using clown routines during games.⁶⁷ The elimination of clowning was short-lived, and the team soon left the league and went back to their former routines and barnstorming existence.

In contrast, black newspapers spotlighted the more mainstream black baseball teams and their experiences. For many of the leading black sportswriters, the clowning

⁶⁵ For an account of black musical performers and the double meaning of seemingly racist performances, see David Krasner, "Parody and Double Consciousness in the Language of Early Black Musical Theatre" *African American Review* 29 (Summer 1995): 317-323.

⁶⁶ Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 139.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

teams were detrimental to the goals of organized black baseball. To counter these negative forces, the papers emphasized the professionalism inherent in the Negro Leagues. The *Chicago Defender* portrayed Paige in a much different matter than the white papers, emphasizing his skill and making a direct point about the inherent inequality of the prohibition against black players in the major leagues. The image printed in the *Defender* depicted Paige in mid wind up, in a naturalistic manner (Figure 3.21). Paige was drawn true-to-life for the main picture, rather than as a caricature. In order to make a political point about segregation, the *Defender* artist chose to show Paige's opponent and audience as white men. In the lower corner of the block, Paige successfully gains another base while a white infielder waits in vain to receive the ball. In the upper right hand corner, three white men appear perplexed with questions marks over their head. These men seem shocked at Paige's remarkable pitching speed. According to the caption, "[b]ig time pitchers from the major leagues sit up and take notice when Satch starts tossing the ball around."⁶⁸ The *Defender's* depiction of Paige emphasized both his success and his status as one of the main arguments against the segregation of major league baseball.

As Negro League attendance increased with the start of World War II, the potential integration of the major leagues became a pivotal issue on the sports pages

⁶⁸ "He'll Toss them for Chicago's Provident Hospital Sunday," *Chicago Defender*, 30 August 1941 in Satchel Paige players file, Ashland Collection, National Baseball Hall of Museum.

Figure 3.21: *Chicago Defender* August 30, 1941

of the black press.⁶⁹ Black sportswriters utilized Paige as a major tool in the fight for integrating major league baseball. Paige's high profile among both black and white baseball fans made his image one of the most easily recognizable in black baseball and the most powerful symbol of black baseball success and ability. In a 1942 *Opportunity* article, William Brower argued that it was "time for baseball to erase the blackball," supporting his contention with examples of the "Negro players whose skills qualify them for major league play, but are boycotted because of their skin."⁷⁰ The article included a few photographic illustrations, highlighting the most renowned Negro Leaguers of the time, Josh Gibson, Willie Wells, Ray Dandridge, Henry Williams, Mule Suttles, and the omnipresent Paige. Paige's picture stood out among the rest, however. The first two photographs were traditional and mostly unremarkable. The photograph of Gibson depicted him in motion and the picture of Wells, Dandridge, Williams and Suttles was a posed group shot. Paige's photograph, however, made a pointed argument against segregation, while bolstering claims of the white establishment's acknowledgment of his baseball prowess.⁷¹

In the photo, Paige, dressed in Yankee pinstripes, appeared to be in conversation with three well-dressed white men, Joe Williams, Grover Cleveland Alexander (famed white major league pitcher), and New York Mayor LaGuardia (Figure 3.22). The picture communicated a great deal to the readers of *Opportunity* magazine. Paige's

⁶⁹ Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 90, 98.

⁷⁰ William A. Brower, "Time for Baseball to Erase the Blackball" *Opportunity* 20 (June 1942), 165.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 165-167.

Figure 3.22: William A. Brower, “Time for Baseball to Erase the Blackball”

Opportunity 20 (June 1942).



pinstriped uniform recalled the most famous and well-regarded franchises in major league baseball, the New York Yankees, underscoring both his qualifications for such a team and the color line barrier that prevented him from joining such a team. The picture was taken before a Black Yankees game at Yankee Stadium, the figurative center of the white baseball world. Once again, Paige's restricted access to major league facilities, and Yankee Stadium in particular, underscored the hypocrisy of white baseball's policies.

On a basic level, the mere presence of these men at a Negro League games lent legitimacy to black baseball in the mind of white baseball fans and bolstered black fans' and players' desire for access to the major leagues. Even for those advocates of black baseball as a truly black enterprise, the ultimate goal was the elimination of the color line in the major leagues, achieving integration.

LaGuardia, in particular, made a powerful statement by appearing in the photograph. As a supporter of baseball integration and mayor of a city with three major league franchises, LaGuardia's presence symbolized to black fans that some progress was being made toward integration.⁷² Finally, Paige's presence among powerful white men,

⁷² In 1944, LaGuardia appointed a ten person commission "to study racial discrimination in professional baseball." The committee, which included New York Yankees' president Larry MacPhail, Brooklyn Dodgers' president Branch Rickey, and tapdancer/entertainer Bill Robinson, recommended "that the major leagues lose no time adopting a policy whereby Negro Players would receive equal opportunity for advancing." "Committee Report to Mayor, Asks Equal Rights for Negro in Baseball" *New York Times* 19 November 1945. LaGuardia threw out the first pitch at Negro League games at least twice in the 1940s. "Black Yanks Break Even" *New York Times* 12 May 1941; "Mayor To Open Negro Series" *New York Times* 12 September 1942. The picture in Figure 3.22 may be from the May 1941 game, at which Paige pitched the first game of a doubleheader. See also Henry D. Fetter, "The Party Line and the Color Line:

in both the political and athletic worlds, reinforced the common knowledge among black baseball fans that Paige was known as a prominent athlete outside of the Negro Leagues, among the very men who could influence the segregationist policies of white baseball, if they so desired. Paige's demeanor in the picture was equally noteworthy, he stood tall, smiling, looking Alexander directly in the eye. In fact, LaGuardia was the only subject seemingly aware of the camera lens. The framing of the picture and the expression of the subjects implied an equality not often found in contemporary depictions of interracial groupings.

Scanning the crowd in the background of the photo, readers would have noticed the integrated crowd that had gathered to watch Paige and the Black Yankees compete. In the audience, African American patrons occupied choice seats directly behind LaGuardia. Consequently, black baseball fans, inspired by wartime calls to institute racial equality on the homefront, would have viewed the favorable seating for black attendees as an important shift. Not only did this picture indicate that Paige and his fellow players might earn a chance to break the baseball color line, but also that black fans could more fully participate in the consumption of baseball as a leisure activity.

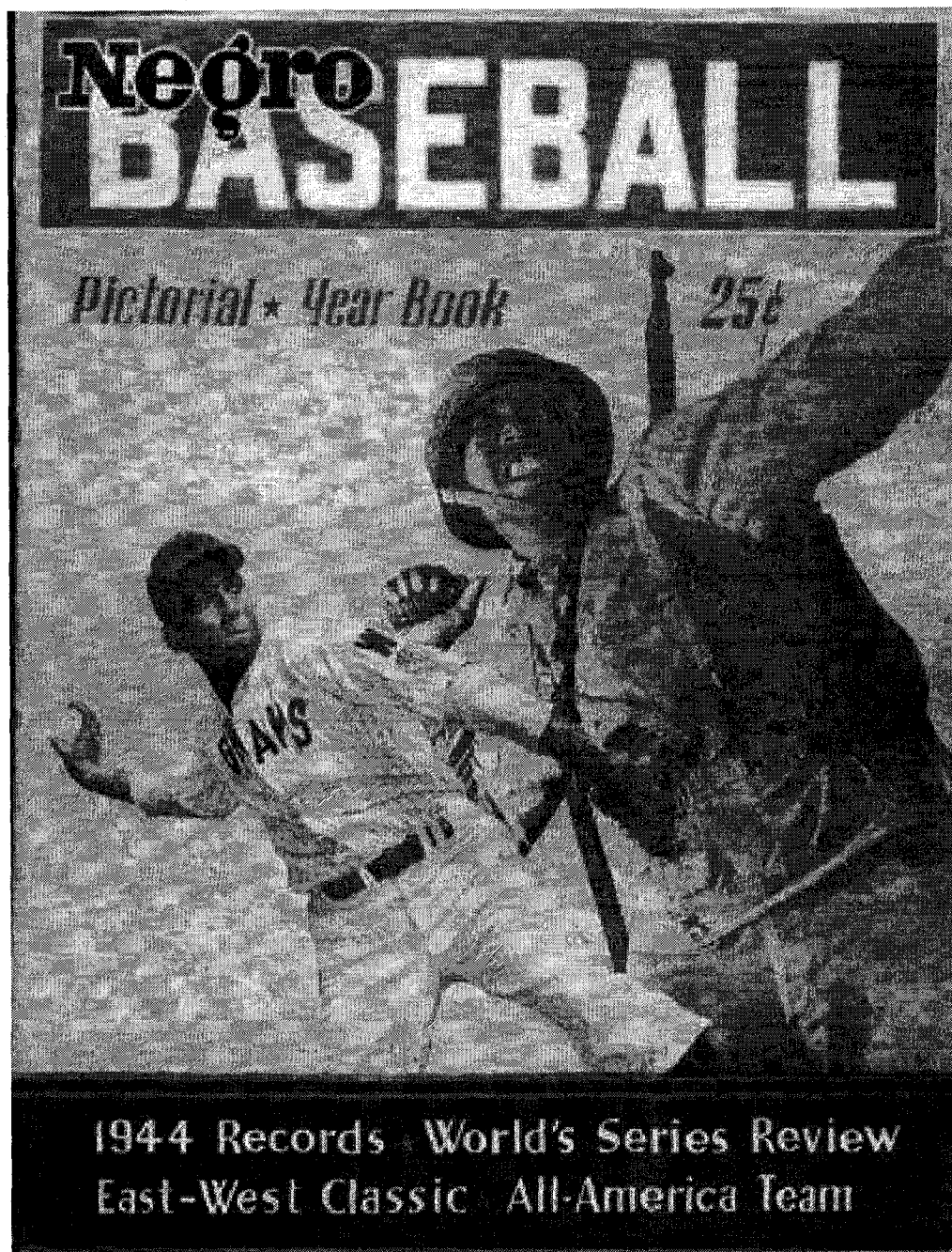
The American Communist Party, the Daily Worker, and the Jackie Robinson" *Journal of Sport History* 28 (Fall 2001): 383. Despite these seemingly progressive actions, LaGuardia had a mixed record on race during his tenure as mayor. In 1935, LaGuardia "commissioned...but refused to publish" E. Franklin Frazier's "report on the 1935 Harlem uprising." LaGuardia presumably objected to the findings of Frazier and his committee, who concluded that "the white police camped in Harlem" were "the enemy," and that problems of "discrimination, health, jobs, housing, crime, police brutality..." were "brought on not by the African American residents but by racial oppression." Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 180-181.

World War II and the service of African American soldiers in the war effort increased the pressure on major league baseball to integrate and provided important visual imagery that the black press used to intensify media attention to the disparity between the treatment of African Americans at home and the ideological basis of U.S. involvement in World War II.⁷³ The 1944 Negro League Yearbook seized on wartime imagery to expose the hypocrisy of the color line in baseball. The cover artwork showed an African American soldier throwing a grenade superimposed over the image of a Negro League player throwing a baseball (Figure 3.23). On the cover, both men are in the same stance and have similar facial expression. Particularly within the context of the Double V campaign of the World War II era, the cover sent a clear message. How could the United States deny black men, who willingly served in the military, the same rights as white men?⁷⁴ The published images of the World War II era employed a similar strategy as that

⁷³ As mentioned in Chapter Two, while black teams did lose players, including future Hall-of-Famers Larry Doby and Monte Irvin, the Negro Leagues did not suffer the wholesale depletion of talent that the major leagues did during World War II. Numerous historians have argued that World War II was a watershed moment in the push for the integration of major league baseball. For a few representative examples, see Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 209-210; Donald Spivey, "The Black Athlete In Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-1968" *Phylon* 44 (1983): 121; Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 43.

⁷⁴ Some African American men, particularly young working-class men, did not willingly enlist and instead actively avoided the draft. Malcolm X and Dizzy Gillespie were two of the "hundreds, perhaps thousands of zoot suiters and musicians who dodged the draft" because "they opposed the war altogether, insisting that African Americans could not afford to invest their blood in another 'white man's war.'" Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 171-172. Muhammad Ali would make a similar argument during his fight to avoid induction in the

Figure 3.24: Negro Baseball Pictorial Yearbook, 1944.



Vietnam War draft. Howard Bingham and Max Wallace, *Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight: Cassius Clay vs. the United States of America* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 2000), 112-119.

Figure 3.25 *New York Age* September 18, 1943.



undertaken by black periodicals during World War I. By invoking the powerful imagery of a black soldier, the *Yearbook* spoke to African Americans angered by the injustice of living in a segregated society and to the increasing numbers of sympathetic white Americans who felt that men who were willing to die for their country should not be denied opportunities in the major leagues.⁷⁵

In choosing to highlight a black soldier throwing a grenade, the editors of the *Yearbook* seized upon a visual image that would have disturbed a number of white Americans. Portrayals of armed black soldiers served as a potent symbol of the potential power and strength of black men. Black soldiers participating in the violence of war were exerting their masculinity in a noble, patriotic manner, thus adhering to the ideal of (white) American manhood. According to Patricia Turner:

The antiblack rumors that circulated during wartime reflect the ambivalence, insecurity, and uneasiness felt during a time of crisis. The dominant culture did not embrace the idea of training black men to shoot, but the idea that they share the risk of being shot at was perfectly acceptable. Blacks were empowered, in short, by America's need for them. A nation that had always tried to limit black access to weapons suddenly needed to train black soldiers. Few roles reinforce masculinity more than that of soldier. Whites knew, moreover, that they could not easily ask blacks to be soldiers while denying them the full rights of citizenship and increased access to the American dream.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Happy Chandler, who became Commissioner after Kennesaw Landis's death in 1944, reportedly made similar arguments. Telling black sportswriters, "If a black boy can make it in Okinawa and Guadalcanal, hell, he can make it in baseball. Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 43. Similarly, in 1945, the "League for Equality in Sport and Amusement" held a protest at Yankee Stadium on opening day. Protesters carried signs proclaiming "If We Can Stop Bullets, Why Not Balls?" Fetter, "The Party Line and the Color Line," 382.

⁷⁶ Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 44-45.

By claiming access to manhood, these men were also claiming a degree of power within American society that had heretofore been denied to them on the basis of their skin color. The editors of the *Yearbook* thus sent a message of equality and civil rights to their readers, one that highlighted the underlying strength of black soldiers.⁷⁷

Similarly, weekly black newspapers highlighted the inequities of racial discrimination during a time when black soldiers were serving their country in the armed forces. The black press published photos of integrated army baseball teams (Figure 3.24), noting that major league baseball had failed to integrate while the army allowed its soldiers to participate as part of integrated teams. Photos such as the one published in 1943 underscored African Americans' desire for the end of segregated baseball and reinforced the symbolic importance of black army service in the fight for increased civil rights on the homefront.

A number of Negro League officials and players also viewed World War II as a time of great opportunity for domestic racial progress. Effa Manley, business manager of the Newark Eagles and wife of team owner Abe Manley, became very involved in the war effort on the home front, seeing the connection between successful black soldiers and the improvement of racial conditions for African Americans.⁷⁸ Manley arranged

⁷⁷ Black press depictions of World War I soldiers de-emphasized the underlying potential for violence and armed resistance inherent in black soldiers. Yet, at the time, even a photograph of a black soldier in uniform could be viewed as a subversive and dangerous act. On violence perpetrated on uniformed World War I soldiers, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 51; Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy," 1485.

⁷⁸ Manley was involved with numerous efforts to promote racial advancement and progress. Along with the Newark NAACP, she organized a concert by Hazel Scott in response to the D.A.R.'s refusal to allow Marian Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. "Hazel Scott Concert" letter, "Hire

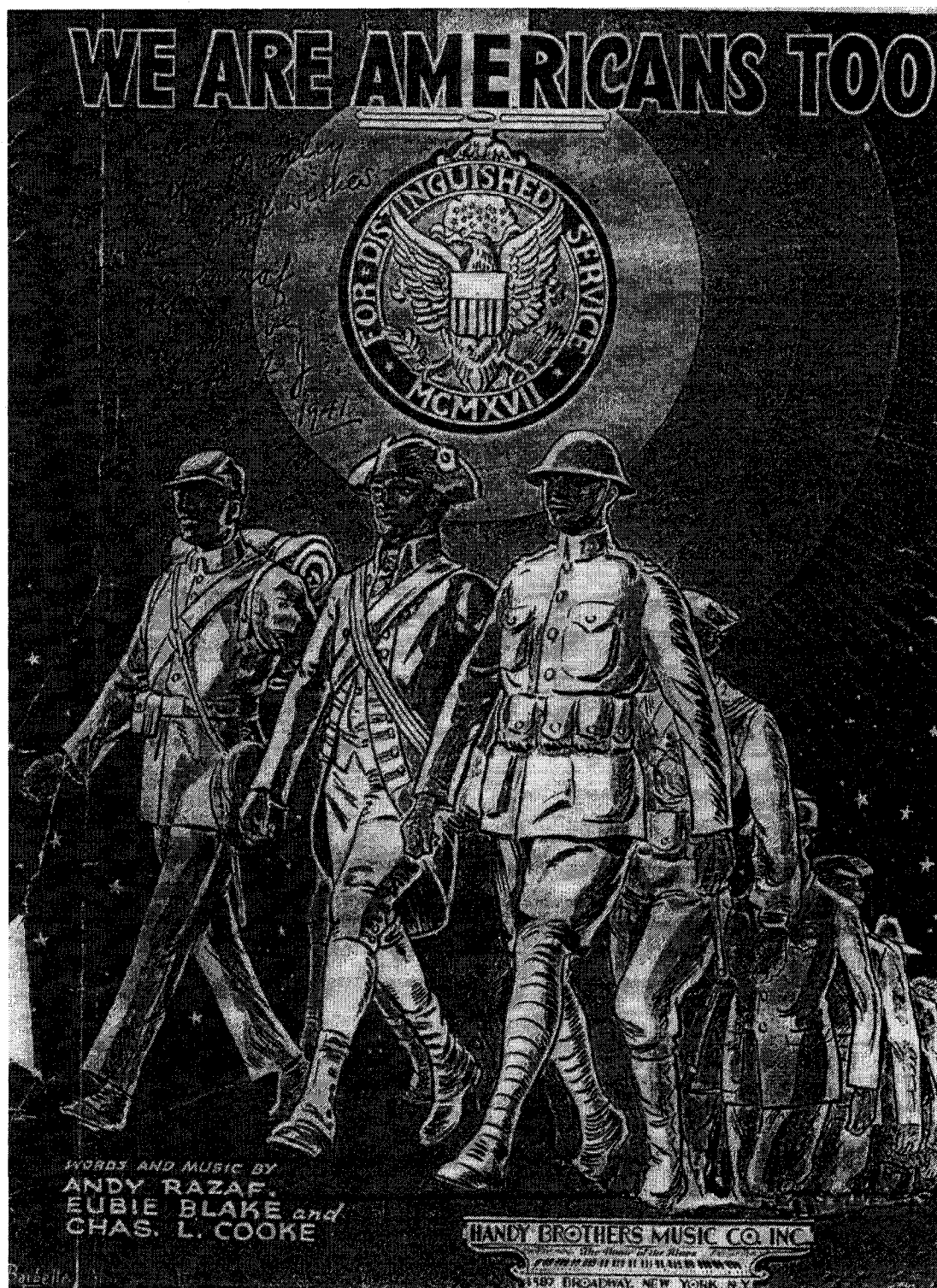
numerous fundraisers to benefit soldiers and actively promoted the Double V campaign.⁷⁹ Within her personal files, Manley kept a copy of a musical piece given to her by one of the composers. Entitled, “We Are Americans Too,” the music cover depicted black soldiers marching off to war (Figure 3.25). The lyrics recalled the history of black soldiers in America, highlighting the contribution of African Americans to the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and World War I. The song continued on to connect the success of the black soldier with other accomplishments of African Americans “in business, science, letters, art.” At its conclusion, the song noted the place of sport in African American history: “In ring, on cinder track and field, True sportsmanship we have revealed.”⁸⁰ Both the lyrics and the cover image had particular symbolism at the time Manley received them in 1941. Capitalizing on patriotic imagery and historical examples, the song made a persuasive argument for the acceptance of racial equality within the United States.

Negro Clerks” *New York Age*, 4 August 1934; Wendell Smith, “New Duties Indicate Moguls Have Finally Recognized Her Ability As An Executive” in “Smitty’s Sports-Spurts” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 January 1943; “Provides Shows for Soldiers” in “New Jersey Afro Honor Roll” 12 February 1944, Effa Manley file, Ashland Collection, NBHFM. Manley was a white woman who grew up in an interracial family and married an African American man. For further information on Manley, her background, and her charity work, see James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Landham, MA: The Scarecrow Press, 1998); Effa Manley and Leon Herbert Hartwick, *Negro Baseball... Before Integration* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1976).

⁷⁹ “Provides Shows for Soldiers” in “New Jersey Afro Honor Roll,” 12 February 1944, Effa Manley file, Ashland Collection, NBHFM.

⁸⁰ Andy Razaf, Eubie Blake, and Chas L. Cooke, “We are Americans Too” (New York: Handy Brothers Music Co, Inc), Effa Manley file, Ashland Collection, NBHFM.

Figure 3.25: Sheet music cover, *We Are Americans Too*



Similarly, Kansas City Monarchs owner J.L. Wilkinson tied the war effort to his attempts to draw large crowds for his team. Wilkinson took advantage of the increasing number of workers who migrated to Kansas City in order to find defense work during the war by scheduling games in accordance with their work schedules. Wilkinson also approved advertisements in the *Kansas City Call* that portrayed Uncle Sam as a promoter for the Monarchs. Moreover, Wilkinson made charitable overtures that emphasized his commitment to the war effort by admitting uniformed soldiers without charge to Monarchs' games.⁸¹

Satchel Paige also seized upon World War II as a platform by which he could gain further publicity. Unsurprisingly, Paige's motives were not purely due to his commitment to racial uplift and progress. Throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, Paige battled with Negro League owner and officials over the extraordinarily profitable East-West All Star Game. Paige and his fellow players were well-aware of the financial windfall that the All Star Game represented and were also conscious of the fact that their pay paled in comparison with the profits of the owners. Determined to get a larger share of the take, Paige participated in numerous ploys to persuade owners to more generously compensate the players. In 1943, Paige teamed with Josh Gibson and threatened to boycott the game unless his financial conditions were met. The owners, anxious to hold on to the two marquee names of black baseball acquiesced.⁸² The following year, Paige made a similar attempt to increase the players' share. When he negotiated alone, however, the owners decided they could hold the game without him. Paige then forced

⁸¹ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 100-101.

⁸² Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 103; Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, 159-160.

the league's hand by making the negotiations into an issue of patriotism. Claiming that all he wanted was for the league to donate its profits to a charity for World War II soldiers, Paige publicly claimed he would refuse to play unless the All-Star Game was staged as a benefit game.⁸³ Despite failing to persuade the owners to either increase his pay or donate their profits, Paige continued to seize upon the imagery of World War II for self-promotion. During a contract dispute with the league, after he had once again jumped to a better paying opportunity after signing with the Manley's Newark Eagles, Paige compared the league's treatment of its players to "Hitlerism" in an interview with the Richmond Afro-American.⁸⁴

With the wartime decimation of white male baseball, increasing number of fans, especially white fans, turned to black baseball and the new All American Girls Professional Baseball League.⁸⁵ The Kansas City Monarchs attracted large biracial

⁸³ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 103; Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, 163-165. Ribowsky notes that Paige only requested the charitable donation after being refused a greater percentage of the gate. *Don't Look Back*, 223-224.

⁸⁴ "Satchell Says He's Satisfied to Be Outlaw" *Richmond Afro-American* in Satchel Paige file, Ashland Collection, NBHFM.

⁸⁵ "Club owners have both the pace hastening ramifications of World War II and the unprecedented publicity accorded Paige...by white writers to thank as being directly responsible for this box office renaissance." Ric Roberts, "Negro Big League Baseball A Two-Million Dollar Business" *Negro Baseball Pictorial Yearbook*, 1944, 5. See also Donald Spivey, "The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-1968" *Phylon* 44 (1983): 120-121.

crowds, averaging almost seven thousand fans each game.⁸⁶ Restrictions on wartime travel and gasoline rations increased attendance in the home cities of many Negro League teams.⁸⁷ Moreover, the early 1940s witnessed a revival of attention to black baseball on the part of the mainstream white media. Feature articles on Satchel Paige appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, and *Look*.⁸⁸ Consequently, black baseball seized the opportunity to make yet another concerted push for the integration of major league baseball.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Bruce notes that the Monarchs consistently attracted a larger crowd than the local white minor league team, the Kansas City Blues, despite the Blues' ties to the Yankees, team members such as Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra, and consistently successful seasons. Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 100-101.

⁸⁷ Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 149-150. These same restrictions also limited the amount of barnstorming undertaken by black baseball teams. Negro League baseball teams were only allowed to travel a maximum of 700 miles in a one-month period. Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 162.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. Although these articles did bring increased white national attention to Paige and black baseball, they also reinforced disparaging racial stereotypes. The *Saturday Evening Post* article, in particular, painted Paige as a clowning caricature, a "Stepinfetchit" character. Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 188-190.

⁸⁹ Donald Spivey has attributed the integration of baseball and other professional sports to World War II. Spivey also notes that most major intercollegiate football teams had at least one black team member by the conclusion of the war. Spivey, "The Black Athlete," 121. Black baseball also witnessed significant player losses due to World War II. According to one contemporary article, "[a]lthough there is no definite way of determining the accuracy of this statement, Negro baseball probably has sent more of its stars to war than any other professional sport of comparative stature." Black baseball remained popular though in part due to the longstanding Negro League tradition of hanging on to very veteran players, at a point at which contemporary white players would have retired and been released. The name recognition of these veterans was too valuable of a commodity for black baseball to relinquish. Thus, many of the famous black ball players who did not serve in World War II were at an age where military drafting was not an option. On

Media depictions of black baseball in the first half of the twentieth century were powerful pieces of visual propaganda designed to persuade viewers of particular racial and political views. *Half-Century Magazine*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* employed sporting images, particularly those of black baseball, to advocate a particularly middle-class view of racial uplift. Others, like those in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, made pointed critiques of segregation, fan behavior, and baseball politics. Meanwhile, white newspapers and commentators continued to depict black baseball as an enterprise marked by incompetence and played by minstrel-type characters. Particularly with the advent of the clowning teams of the Depression Era, black baseball players had to negotiate between the extremes of racial pride and profitable marketing campaigns that emphasized “tribalness.”

Through the space of visual imagery within the black press, African Americans contested the limitations and presumptions of segregation. With photographs and editorial art, the black community established a distinct counter argument to notions of white athletic and moral superiority. Especially in using editorial art, African Americans refashioned a medium that had previously reinforced and disseminated notions of white supremacy. By explicitly promoting black baseball as a viable (and at times preferable) alternative to the white major leagues, the black press sought to support the Negro Leagues as a race enterprise and build the foundation for the eventual breaking of the major league color line.

black ball player service, see Art Carter, “Negro Baseball Players Star for Uncle Sam” *Negro Baseball Pictorial Yearbook*, 1944, 22-23, 27; Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 162.

Similarly, black baseball players and fans constructed an oral culture that disseminated a similar respect for the Negro Leagues. Through the use of trickster tales and (nick)naming practices, African American baseball advocates would continue to challenge and critique segregated sport and its racist underpinnings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Signifying Baseball: Tricksters, Nicknames, and Folklore in Black Baseball

The 1989 documentary *There Was Always Sun Shining Somewhere* opens with former Negro League player Chet Brewer relating a story from the days of segregated baseball. Brewer describes the travails of a young African American athlete who wanted to play baseball for the local white baseball team. Day after day, the boy arrived at the ballpark and tried to persuade the manager to allow him to play with the team. By the third day, the annoyed manager threatened to call the police if he did not leave the field. Unwilling to give up his quest, the boy purchased a ticket directly behind the dugout in order to continue his campaign. At this point, the manager, no longer able to threaten eviction and willing to do anything to quiet the boy, relented and instructed his coach to find a uniform for the new player. Because the home team faced one of the best relief pitchers in the league, the manager believed that the persistent young boy would strike out and embarrass himself, solving the problem. With the bases loaded, the manager brought the new player in as a pinch hitter. On the first pitch, the boy knocked a line drive back against the right field fence. As the boy rounded second base, the increasingly

excited manager exclaimed “look at that Cuban go!” Brewer concluded, “so... with one swing of the bat, he progressed from a black boy without a job to a Cuban with a job.”¹

Accounts such as Brewer’s were common during the days of Negro League baseball.² Players and commentators told tales of black baseball that directly, or indirectly critiqued major league baseball’s insistence on maintaining a strict color line. Brewer’s story clearly indicted major league baseball for a practice that allowed white officials enormous discretion in terms of accepting light-skinned Hispanic players while refusing to entertain the idea of African American players. Moreover, the anecdote reflected African American’s frustrations with a biracial system that constantly shifted. At times, American racial classifications and policies were extremely rigid in contrast with the fluidity of racial identity. Yet, in other instances, racial definitions and practices were amorphous and undefined, requiring African Americans to interpret the racial atmosphere based on past experience and word of mouth.³ Brewer and others relayed such tales to highlight the racist assumptions of major league baseball officials and the willingness of white managers to bend the color line in order to win ball games.

¹ *There Was Always Sun Shining Someplace* Producer Craig Davidson, Refocus Productions in Association with Southwest Texas Public Broadcasting Corporation, 1989.

² Although it is almost impossible to prove the veracity of many of these stories, including Brewer’s, their existence and their dissemination demonstrate their significance to black vernacular culture during Jim Crow.

³ Laura Browder has explored the way in which Americans have constructed their own ethnic and racial identities by playing on the ambiguous definitions of race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In particular, she analyzed “the many ways in which American autobiographers have employed an Indian identity to negotiate or escape black/white binaries.” *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 111-131.

Throughout the Jim Crow era, African Americans employed different strategies within a vernacular expressive culture to challenge the traditional (white) stereotypes regarding black athletes. Through the use of trickster tales and naming practices, African Americans asserted an alternative to the prevalent notion of white supremacy. Black baseball as revealed in common tales and nicknames was an organized, sophisticated institution that boasted the very best athletes; men who were also quick-witted, clever, and cool.

In this chapter, I will analyze the meaning and importance of trickster tales and nicknames within black baseball. First, I will discuss the theory of the hidden transcript and signifying practice, which were the two means by which African Americans communicated radical and politicized messages within trickster tales and nicknames. Next, I will turn to an examination of the trickster tales about black baseball. What do these trickster tales reveal about African American attitudes toward travel, the color line, and passing? How do these tales establish a narrative of black athletic superiority? Turning to nicknames, I will then explore the significance of team and individual nicknames. These nicknames frequently reinforced the community ideals that were inherent in trickster tales by challenging the color line and celebrating black baseball's achievements.

Because most of these tales were part of African American oral expressive culture, it is difficult to situate these tales within a time-specific historical context. Some of these stories made appearances in the black press, but not all did. Many were passed by word of mouth, at the ballpark, in barbershops, and on the road. Consequently, most of our documentation of these tales comes from the reminiscences of former Negro

League players. In a number of instances, the details of the story provide enough information to establish at least a general time frame for the events discussed. By decoding the timeline of these stories, broad temporal and thematic themes do emerge.

Generally, the early trickster tales of black baseball (roughly 1900-1920s) repeated two general stories. Many of these tales involved African Americans attempting, or being advised, to pass as Latino or Native American. The second, and frequently related, theme was that of the famous white major league player or manager praising a black ball player, bemoaning the restriction of the color line that prevent the players' signing, and, in some instances, persuading the player to assume a different racial identity in order to compete in the white major leagues.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the stories began to slightly shift. Although tales where white officials praised black players still circulated, they often did so with a significant difference. In these stories, the white player/manager often assigned an astronomical dollar value to the player in question and remarked on the player's athletic superiority in comparison to contemporary white players. This shift to an emphasis on superiority also marked the other trickster tales told during this time period. 1930s and 1940s trickster tales frequently espoused the superiority of black baseball through tales that hyperbolically boasted of superhuman speed or strength, that lauded the inventiveness of black baseball, and that emphasized the intimidation of and overwhelming defeat of white (especially major league) teams and players.

The trickster tales of Negro League baseball had two different forms, the direct story and the indirect story. Brewer's direct tale clearly addresses the issues of racial

expectations and classifications. The indirect tale communicated double meanings to other African Americans. White audiences only accessed the superficial layer of meaning within these tales. Taken at face value, white observers considered these trickster tales as amusing anecdotes, further entertainment from popular black athletes. African American audiences, however, could recognize a second layer of meaning beneath the story. In this second layer, the storyteller communicated an additional lesson and the tale became a story of how a trickster was able to get the better of white authorities.⁴ James C. Scott has termed these two levels of meaning the public transcript and the hidden transcript. According to Scott, the public transcript is clear to both dominant and subordinate groups in a society, while each group has their own additional hidden transcript that only members of their own group, be it dominant or subordinate, understand. In analyzing the trickster tales of Negro League baseball, it is crucial to consider both the public and hidden transcript of these tales. By utilizing tales with

⁴ This interpretation is based on the work of George Lipsitz and James C. Scott. George Lipsitz describes the performance of jazz artist Rahsaan Roland Kirk in similar terms. Kirk communicated “multi-layered and heavily coded cover messages about the past.” Yet, only certain members of Kirk’s audiences understood the codes hidden within his music. To the other portion of the audience, “Kirk’s music inevitably appeared as just another novelty and diversion within the seemingly autonomous realm of commercialized leisure.” Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 4. On the theory of recovering these coded (or hidden) meanings, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3-41, 136-156.

double meanings and transcripts, the purveyors of black baseball trickster tales infused their stories with political meaning by exposing hypocrisy in Jim Crow America.⁵

A large and important part of the hidden transcript, particularly for African Americans, is the practice of signifying. According to Henry Louis Gates, a signifying practice is symbolized by the tale of the signifying monkey and involves a series of tropes.⁶

Free of the white person's gaze, black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms. Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to music and language use... Signifyin(g)...is repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference.⁷

Thus, within the hidden transcript, one can signify on someone by playing on their words with a response that utilizes another form of meaning or by utilizing words that have double layers of meaning.⁸ First and foremost among signifying practice is the tale of the

⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 3-41, 136-156.

⁶ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

⁸ Geneva Smitherman discusses a similar practice of linguistic double meaning. According to Smitherman, "*When White English words are given a black semantic interpretation, their range of referents increases*. For blacks, English words can have potentially two levels of meanings, one black, one white. Since blacks share in the consensus dialect of the American mainstream, on one level a word's referent is the same for blacks and whites. But since blacks also share a linguistic subculture outside that mainstream, on another level (the Black Semantic level) the same word has multiple meanings and associations. Thus within the black level of meaning there are many sublevels...one word in the black lexicon can serve many different purposes because Black Semantics is highly context-bound." *Talkin and*

signifying monkey. The signifying monkey usually involves a lion, an elephant, and a monkey. In these stories, the monkey, through his verbal acumen, incites the lion to provoke a fight with the elephant. When the lion returns to the monkey, bruised, battered, and looking to take his frustrations out on the monkey, the monkey agrees to fight but once again verbally outwits the lion, who is crushed by the elephant. The signifying monkey tales express admiration for the ability of the smaller animal to outwit and verbally outplay its larger nemesis. The signifying monkey serves as a trickster figure in these folktales.⁹

In order to fully explore the hidden transcript of trickster tales in black baseball, one needs to understand the protagonist's role. Tricksters have a long and storied history among African Americans, taking forms from the signifying monkey to the brer rabbit. "In traditional black culture, Trickster is a material representation of the open mood. Trickster is a transformer; he provokes change. Trickster takes up and redescribes the structural features available at the margins."¹⁰ In other words, the trickster was and is a figure with the ability to call authority and structure into question. When the trickster signified on racist structures, the twentieth-century African American trickster revealed the weaknesses in Jim Crow authorities.

With the presence of the trickster, Negro League baseball both reflected long cultural traditions and provided a new process for the creation of black folk heroes. As

Testifyin: The Language of Black America (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 59, emphasis original.

⁹ Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 55-58.

¹⁰ Laura C. Jarmon, *Wishbone: Reference and Interpretation in Black Folk Narrative* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 221.

Jim Crow policies in both the South and the North externally limited access to a number of opportunities, African Americans found their heroes in institutions like black baseball and boxing, arenas where African American men proved their prowess over and against white men.¹¹ Baseball, in particular, with its intoxicating combination of physical skill and quick-witted chatter, allowed for the development of tricksters and the practice of signifying.¹² The triumph of black manhood in terms of athletic success and verbal one-upmanship reinforced cultural and racial pride and exposed the weaknesses in racist arguments.

Moreover, these players functioned as heroes within many African American communities.¹³ As such, their behaviors had significant implications for other members

¹¹ John W Roberts describes the process of hero creation in *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 1-5. Roberts argues that hero creation works hand in hand with culture building. When culture building is threatened, groups create heroes who can help put their culture building process back on track. On Jack Johnson's significance to African Americans, see Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 131, 144-145, 219-220, 236-237.

¹² Kyle P. McNary claims that "It was black baseball, after all, that first introduced base coaches, not only to help runners and give signs, but to entertain crowds with a constant line of chatter." McNary, *Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe: 36 Years of Pitching and Catching in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (Minneapolis: McNary Publishing, 1994), 29. Writers and owners, at times, criticized players for talking during the games, especially when that talking led to disputes with umpires or fans. William Nunn, "Rowdyism in Baseball" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 May 1932.

¹³ Ralph Ellison called particular attention to black athletes' importance as heroes. "while baseball, basketball, and football player cannot really tell us how to write our books, they *do* demonstrate where

of their race. John Roberts notes “[i]n reality, the actions that a group recognizes as heroic are those that it perceives as the most advantageous behaviors for dealing with an obstacle or situation that threatens the values that guide action within specific temporal or social, political, and economic contexts.”¹⁴ Thus, in the first half of the twentieth century, black baseball players functioned as heroes precisely because many African Americans viewed them as working towards racial improvement by conceding to certain codes of behavior while challenging stereotypical notions of racial achievement through behaviors of resistance.

The early tales of the Negro Leagues centered on trickster strategies to overcome the racial prohibitions of the white major leagues. In these stories, individual players, aided by sympathetic white baseball officials, attempted to camouflage themselves as Hispanic or Native American in order to gain entrance to white baseball. Ultimately, most of the players in the stories rejected the possibility of passing.

One of the first, and most frequently repeated, tales was the story of Charlie Grant. In 1901, McGraw, impressed by the talents of Charlie Grant, a Negro League player and African American, renamed Grant “Chief Tokohama” and claimed that Grant was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian (and therefore an eligible major league player). The opposing team’s players recognized Grant and exposed his racial background, thus

much of the significant action is taking place. Often they are themselves cultural heroes who work powerful modification in American social attitudes.” Ralph Ellison, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage International, 1986), 216.

¹⁴ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 5.

ending the experiment before it truly began.¹⁵ In one version of the Tokohama story, it is Charles Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox, who stops McGraw from playing Grant. According to Mark Ribowsky, Comiskey, in a strange game of racial chicken, threatened to play a “Chinaman” if McGraw played Grant. Although his reaction may seem odd, Comiskey’s threat exposed one of the major concerns of white baseball: if one African American was allowed to compete, the doors would be wide open and baseball would be filled with black and non-white players.¹⁶

¹⁵ According to biographer Charles C. Alexander, McGraw’s interest in signing African American players was driven by an interest in acquiring the best players. McGraw was “no crusader for racial justice...though...always on the lookout for new talent.” Alexander, *John McGraw* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 75.

¹⁶ Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 51. In 1940, a *Saturday Evening Post* writer presented a different account of Grant’s unmasking. In a feature article on Satchel Paige, Ted Shane related the following story as told by the lyricist and composer, Oscar Hammerstein, identified by the author as the “proprietor of a Harlem hot spot.” In order to fool the opposition, McGraw instructed Grant to yell “wah-wah-wah-wah!” and “grunt, ‘Me-big black Injun.’” This strategy was successful but Grant’s cover was blown because “the Negro world couldn’t contain itself. When he arrived in Chicago, he was met by the entire South side and a colored Elks band.” This version of the McGraw-Grant story flips the ending and thus places the blame for McGraw’s exposure to African American fans rather than white players. Hammerstein’s position as a white, Jewish business owner in Harlem further complicates this version of the story as does the fact that Hammerstein related it to a reporter for a prominent national publication [with a large white readership]. One imagines that black Harlemites would have preferred the earlier iteration of the tale. In the Hammerstein tale, African American fans exhibit uncontained exuberance and naivete to the apparent detriment of a black ball player. This notion contradicts evidence from a number of black sportswriters that African American fans quietly supported black athletes who were able to pass through the color line

Despite the setback, McGraw never completely abandoned his plan to sign other Negro League players and disguise their race. In a strategy made famous by Negro League folklore, McGraw attempted to convince Oscar Charleston to move to Cuba, learn Spanish, and return as a Cuban immigrant so that McGraw could sign him.¹⁷ According to Tom Gilbert, when McGraw died, his widow found his list of Negro League players to sign if the prohibition of black players was lifted.¹⁸ Unfortunately for

without exposing their racial background. Even when fans were anxious to unmask an athlete, they generally accepted the consolation of knowing an athlete had circumvented the color line. It is also noteworthy that although *Shane* includes quotes and anecdotes from a number of (mostly unnamed) Harlem residents. Hammerstein's quotes only contained dialect when he was attributing words to Grant. Quotes from Paige and "Harlemites" were written in dialect. Shane, "The Chocolate Rube Waddell," *Saturday Evening Post*, 27 July 1940, 80-81. Hammerstein was apparently the noted lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, responsible for musicals such as "Showboat." On Hammerstein, see Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Tom Gilbert, *Baseball and the Color Line* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1995), 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 104. Numerous former Negro League players and their contemporaries specifically cite McGraw as a white manager who expressed interest in their services. Letter from M/Sgt. Bertran T. Beagle, U.S. Army retired, "Bullet Joe Rogan" player file, Ashland Collection, National Baseball Hall of Fame, p. 3; Robinson, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 8. William "Red" Lindsay told an interviewer that team officials with the Washington Pilot promoted games by advertising that McGraw had "proclaimed" Lindsay "the greatest shortstop ever seen." Lindsay contended that McGraw had never actually witnessed him playing a game. The prevalence of the story, however, speaks to the connection between McGraw and the Negro Leagues and the power of those endorsements in attracting crowds. Lindsay, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 19. Dick Powell remembered McGraw as someone who was colorblind. "McGraw didn't care whether you were Asian or Jewish or black, white

McGraw, the Negro League players he targeted were well-known as black baseball players. Consequently, his attempts at subterfuge failed miserably.

Larry Brown told a similar story in an oral interview with John Holway. In Brown's version, Ty Cobb is the one who is interested in Brown and suggested he pass for Cuban. According to Brown, his 1926 winter baseball performance in Havana impressed Cobb. Brown recalled Cobb asking "How would you like to stay down here [Cuba] and learn the *lingua* and come back to the states and pass as Cuban." Brown turned down the proposition, reasoning that he, like Charlie Grant, was well-known in baseball circles and would be recognized. This story has a major inaccuracy--Cobb only played in Cuba for one year, 1910. At that time, Brown was five years old and obviously not yet a Negro League athlete.¹⁹ However, the prevalence of this type of tale underscored the contemporary interest in the fluidity of the color line, particularly the line between Cuban and black. Following the logic of these tales and the opening story by

green or gray. He was just interested in your ability to play baseball and he could see that *in* you. He didn't see you as a person of some particular race, he saw your ability to play the game of baseball." Powell, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 87.

¹⁹ Larry Brown, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 207-209. Mark Ribowsky notes that Cobb "was outhit and overshadowed by [Negro League stars] John Henry Lloyd, Home Run Johnson, and Bruce Petway" during his 1910 trip to Cuba. Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues, 1884-1955* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1995), 68. Another Negro League player, John Davidson was offered a similar opportunity and \$10,000 to pass as Cuban for a New York baseball team. Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985), 9; Louis A. Perez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 266.

Chet Brewer, to change race one only needed to learn a new language or if light skinned, exhibit base-running talent.

In an interesting twist, the substitution of Cobb for McGraw made this story more provocative. Unlike McGraw, who had obtained a reputation among African American baseball players as fair and free of prejudice, Cobb was known as a virulent and violent racist.²⁰ Cobb's background contributed to the power of the trickster tale. In order to impress the racist Cobb, Brown and his colleagues must have been truly exceptional. Moreover, this tale reinforced the concept of the Talented Tenth, by implicitly arguing that an African American could triumph over racism through extraordinary talent.

Satchel Paige related an even more fantastical scheme to subvert the color line in his 1962 autobiography, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*.²¹ According to Paige, in 1926:

²⁰ Brown, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 207-209. Similarly, Bobby Robinson recalled that Cobb "was a personal friend of mine" and praised his hands. Cobb allegedly told Robinson that "if things were like they should be, you'd be playin' third base for my team." Robinson, interview by Kelly, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 8. Cobb's racism was well known. At least two sportswriters reported on Cobb's violent encounters with African American employees. Sol White, "Sol White's Column of Baseball Dope" *Cleveland Advocate*, 10 May 1919; W. Rollo Wilson, "Sports Shots" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 April 1931.

²¹ Many of black baseball's boasts centered on Satchel Paige. Paige was the most well-known Negro League player, among both the black and white communities. Paige reveled in the attention that accompanied his outrageous statements and actions. Paige figured prominently as a trickster in a number of baseball tales. Paige's notoriety made him an attractive character around whom to center trickster tales. Although trickster tales sometimes involved other well-known black baseball players, Paige's fame and outrageous public persona made him the central protagonist for black baseball much like earlier boxing tales centered on Jack Johnson.

Stan Naglin...who ran the Chattanooga Lookouts in the white Southern association...wanted me so bad he tried everything to get me into a game. One day he even came up to me and offered me five hundred dollars to pitch against the Atlanta Crackers. I just had to let him paint me white. When Alex Herman heard about it, he got as mad as anybody I've ever seen....Alex finally talked me out of it, but I sure hated to pass up that five hundred dollars. And I think I'd have looked good in white-face. But nobody would have been fooled. White, black, green, yellow, orange—it don't make any difference. Only one person can pitch like me. That's Ol'Satch, himself.²²

In the 1930s, Dizzy Dean, a major league pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals and a contemporary of Paige, frequently made similar comments about the advantages of making Paige white. In one such instance, Dean suggested that he would like to drop a bucket of calcimine on Paige in order to turn him white. These comments, suggesting that Paige attempt to employ “whiteface” methods, had particular symbolic meaning in a society inundated with advertising campaigns that focused on skin bleaching and hair straightening for African Americans.²³ Moreover, these beauty products and attendant marketing came on the heels of a large tradition of commercial advertisements that made use of similar claims in order to depict African Americans as “dirty” and inferior.²⁴ In an environment where consumers, particularly black consumers, were regularly subjected to

²² LeRoy (Satchel) Paige as told to David Lipman, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever: A Great Baseball Player tells the Hilarious Story Behind the Legend* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962, 1993), 44.

²³ Kathy Peiss, *Hope In a Jar*, 207-212, 226, 231-233.

²⁴ For a discussion of advertising images of African Americans, see Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

racist advertising campaigns, Dean's proposal was both unsurprising and reflective of larger societal assumptions about the primacy of "whiteness."²⁵

In other instances, the trickster tales from this time period stressed an inherent athletic superiority among Negro League players. Judy Johnson recalled such an interaction with famed Philadelphia Athletics owner Connie Mack.²⁶ According to

²⁵ Although they were less prevalent, players continued to recount stories of encounters with white major league officials who urged them to pass as Hispanic in the 1930s and 1940s. Quincy Troupe described his response to the proposition of passing in his autobiography.

One Sunday, after I had pitched the first game, a baseball scout came down from the stands and asked me if I was interested in playing in the big leagues. I was amazed at the question. He suggested that I go to a Latin country and learn Spanish, explaining that if I could speak that language I would have a good chance of playing organized ball. The idea seemed so far fetched to me that to tell you the truth I just did not think much about it.²⁵

Underlying this story, within the hidden transcript, Troupe espoused his belief in the fluidity of racial categories as well as the arbitrary nature of major league baseball's prohibition against black players.²⁵ Yet, at the same time, Troupe advanced the idea that passing was unacceptable to him and that he was unwilling to consider such a refutation of his identity as an African American man. Quincy Troupe, *20 Years Too Soon: Prelude to Major League Integrated Baseball* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1995, 1977), 26. Troupe was born in 1912 and began his baseball career in the 1930s, placing this story's roots to the 1930/1940 timeframe.

²⁶ Webster MacDonald also reported a similar encounter with Mack. According to MacDonald, Mack approached him after a game in which he beat Dizzy Dean at the peak of Dean's career. Mack then commented to MacDonald that he'd "give half my ball club for a man like you." Webster MacDonald interview by Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 87. Mack's son also shared his reported interest in black ball players. According to Cool Papa Bell, Mack's son Earl expressed his admiration for Bell's abilities. "If the door was open, you'd be the first guy I'd hire. I'd pay you \$75,000 a year to play ball. You'd be worth it in drawing power alone." Cool Papa Bell interview by Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 125.

Johnson, as the two were friends, he asked Mack why he had not signed a black player. Mack responded, “[t]here are too many of you to go in. It would have taken too many jobs away from the white boys.”²⁷

Johnson’s tale signifies on the rationalizations offered by white baseball officials regarding the maintenance of the color line. As a counter to the argument that black players were unqualified for the major leagues, Johnson’s encounter with Mack provided an alternative interpretation. Instead, it was the Negro League players who were overqualified to play in the major leagues.

As many black sportswriters in the late 1930s and early 1940s pushed for integrated baseball, they also echoed sentiments of black baseball superiority. Ollie Stewart editorialized in the *Baltimore Afro-American* that the color line provided white professional ballplayers with their only assurance of maintaining their employment. According to Stewart, “You really can’t blame white big league baseball teams, or white groups of any kind from barring colored entries. When you blame them, you’re forgetting the very first law of nature—self-preservation.”²⁸ Under this reasoning, the cessation of

²⁷ Rust, Jr., *Get That Nigger off the Field*, 44.

²⁸ Ollie Stewart, “A Line of Two” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 June 1937. Likewise, *Courier* sportswriter Ches Washington noted that major league clubs would take a great risk in playing against black clubs like the Homestead Grays. “The Pirates would have too much to lose to play the Homesteaders. If the Bucs won, there would be thousands of ‘I told you so’s.’ But if they lost, the floundering Pirates couldn’t afford the loss of caste and prestige which defeat would bring. They just couldn’t take it. And it would prove too much of an economic boomerang at the gate.” “Sez Ches” *Pittsburgh Courier* 18 May 1940. In 1939, Vic Harris, a player on the Homestead Grays, expressed concern for the fate of average Negro League players if integration occurred. “It’s like this. We do have some good ball players among us but not nearly as many

the prohibition against black players in the majors would result in a radical shift in the racial composition of major league baseball.

Thus, this understanding of the color line flipped the traditional interpretation that black baseball players were unqualified for the white majors. Instead, this story made white major leaguers vulnerable to the success and athletic prowess of black ball players. Rather than emphasizing the hypocrisy or unjustness of arbitrary segregation, this tale reinforced the power of black athletes.²⁹

One of the most famous of the trickster folktales focused on the superhuman feats of the black ball players. One such story described the immense speed of “Cool Papa” Bell, arguably the most prominent centerfielder of his time. According to Satchel Paige, who was Bell’s roommate while they both played with the 1930s Pittsburgh Crawfords, Bell moved so fast that he could turn the light switch, jump across the room, and get under the covers before the light went out.³⁰ Obviously, this tale emphasized Bell’s

fit for the majors as seems to be the belief. But if they start picking them up what are the remainder going to do to make a living.” Sam Lacy, “Players Indifferent About Entering Major Leagues” *Baltimore Afro-American* 5 August 1939.

²⁹ A retrospective article on Homestead Gray, Jud Wilson, highlighted his success in an interracial game. “The redoubtable Lefty Grove was mowing down a cast of all-star Negro aces one evening—fanning just about every man who stood in there with his \$100,000 fireball. Jud Wilson watched two of them fog past, then whaled the next out of the park for a two-run homer. “Looking Back 22 Years with Jud Wilson” *Negro Baseball Yearbook* 1944, 26.

³⁰ James “Cool Papa” Bell, interview by Arthur Shaffer and Charles Korr, University of Missouri-St. Louis Oral History Program. September 8, 1971. Transcript, in “Cool Papa” Bell player file, Ashland Collection, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (NBHFM), 35.

remarkable athletic talents, his incredible speed on the baseball field.³¹ More importantly, however, this tale functioned as part of a larger tradition of black boasting. Through boasting, a trickster used hyperbole to assert his masculinity.

Famously, Bell discovered on one trip that the light switch in his hotel room had malfunctioned, causing a pause between when he flipped the switch and when the lights went out. Bell called Paige into his room and told him to sit and watch. "He flicked the switch, strolled over to bed, and pulled the covers up. Bing! The lights went out 'See, Satchel,' he said, 'You've been tellin' people that story bout me for years, and even *you* didn't know it was true.'"³²

The story of Bell's otherworldly speed quickly became legend and was appropriated by Muhammad Ali. Ali also claimed superhuman speed in the same terms. Describing his punching speed, Ali noted "I'm so fast that, last night, I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and was in bed before the room was dark."³³ Ali, infamous for

³¹ Hilton Smith described Bell's speed in baseball terms, though arguably Smith's description was as much hyperbole as Paige's. "Bell was the fastest human I ever saw. I saw him on first base one time...They bunted past second and by the time the second baseman had retrieved the ball, Bell had scored. In 1937 I saw him get four hits, not one past the infield." Hilton Smith, interview by John Holway, Hilton Smith file NBHFM, 28. The *New York Age* praised Bell for his speed in similar terms, calling him "the game's fastest human." *New York Age*, 24 July 1943.

³² Cool Papa Bell, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 107. Buck O'Neil relates a similar version of this tale in his autobiography. In his version, however, Paige bets Bell \$50 that he can't get in bed before the room goes dark. Thus, "[i]t cost him [Paige] fifty bucks to find out Cool Papa Bell was faster than the speed of light." O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 148.

³³ Muhammad Ali in *When We Were Kings* (directed by Leon Gast, 1996). Although *When We Were Kings* was not released until 1996, it was a documentary filmed in 1974.

his boasting statements, used the description of Bell to increase his own legend. For both Bell and Ali, the story celebrated their immense natural talents. Through the tale, the men could lay claim to superhuman athletic talent. Celebrating their speed, they underscored the abilities of their bodies and hence, their masculinity.

Roger Abrahams documented a different version of this story in his 1963 study of black Philadelphia folklore.

Yeah, I'm fast. I'm so fast, a girl told me one time, she said 'Kid, now if you can get some cock 'fore my mother get back home, and she's coming 'round the corner right now, you can have it.' So I said, 'Lay down.' She laid down, I pushed the light switch got undressed, jumped in bed, busted two nuts, got dressed, and got outside the room before that room got dark.³⁴

The Philadelphia version of this story differs from the stories employed by and about Bell. Whereas the initial story capitalizes on the exaggeration inherent in many trickster tales, the latter story redefines the trickster in sexual terms. The youth telling the latter story removes the sporting context. Thus, the story becomes more of a folkloric toast, one that emphasizes masculinity solely in terms of sexuality. By 1963, thirty years after the initial tale, a young African American man had signified upon it, by transforming it into a story of sexual prowess and the ability to evade an authority (the mother) that sought to restrict the performance of sex outside of the bounds of legitimacy.

Trickster tales both supported and challenged the notion that black athletes had superior strength and speed in comparison to white athletes. Many tales highlighted the physical power or speed of black baseball players, while others argued that it was the

³⁴ Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1963, 1970), 35.

finesse or mental quickness of black athletes that allowed them to best their white counterparts.³⁵

Tales of the Negro Leagues also celebrated the superhuman strength of one of their all-stars, Josh Gibson. Gibson, a catcher for the Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays, made a name for himself through his power hitting. Most stories about Gibson revolved around the incredible distance of his home runs.

There is a story that one day during the 1930s the Pittsburgh Crawfords were playing at Forbes Field in Pittsburgh when their young catcher, Josh Gibson, hit the ball so high and far that no one saw it come down. After scanning the sky carefully for a few minutes, the umpire deliberated and ruled it a home run. The next day the Crawfords were playing in Philadelphia when suddenly a ball dropped out of the heavens and was caught by the startled center-fielder on the opposing club. The umpire made the only possible ruling. Pointing to Gibson he shouted, “Yer-out—yesterday in Pittsburgh!”³⁶

Obviously exaggerated stories, such as this one, cast Gibson as a superhuman strongman, a hero through physicality for his race. Much like Bell’s speed, Gibson’s strength symbolized his masculinity and his superior athleticism. Hyperbole aside, Gibson was certainly one of the most proficient homerun hitters of all time. Various sources estimate that Gibson hit upwards of 70 homeruns in a single season, far exceeding the record of

³⁵ Dizzy Dismukes reported in the *Pittsburgh Courier* that “Rube Foster once hit a ball so hard that it split in half.” “Baseball Oddities” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 February 1933. This story was later repeated in a *Saturday Evening Post* article about Satchel Paige, but in the retelling Oscar Charleston was the batter in question. According to “a licorice enthusiast,” Charleston “hit the ball so hard he bus’ the ball to pieces—the covah flyin’ one way—the pieces the other.” Ted Shane, “The Chocolate Rube Waddell” *Saturday Evening Post*, 27 July 1940, 81.

³⁶ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 158.

white contemporary Ruth, who held the major league record of 60 homeruns.³⁷

Moreover, some of Gibson's most storied homeruns took place in Yankee Stadium, the legendary "House that Ruth built" and thus greatly contributed to the mystique of Gibson, who became known as the "Black Babe Ruth."³⁸

In lieu of merely establishing an equivalency of talent, trickster tales involving interracial baseball games promoted black athletic ability as superior to that of white baseball players. In the 1930s, racial tensions escalated within the baseball world as the public debate over the major league color line intensified.³⁹ Within this context, interracial baseball games had an added significance. According to Jack Marshall, a

³⁷ The 1944 *Negro Baseball Yearbook* noted that in 1943 Gibson hit more homeruns at Griffith Stadium than "the entire major American League players put together." "Gibson Holds Griffith Stadium Record" *Negro League Baseball*, 27. See also, Ribowsky, *Complete History*, 152.

³⁸ Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 188; W. Rollo Wilson, "They Could Make the Big Leagues" *The Crisis*, October 1934, 306; Chester L. Washington, "Sez Ches" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 May 1940. See also Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 152.

³⁹ Interracial baseball games in the 1910s also attracted a great deal of attention, particularly in light of the racial tensions surrounding Jack Johnson's interracial boxing victory. See Howard A. Phelps, "Inter-Racial Baseball Should Come To Fruition" *The Half-Century Magazine* April 1919, 8; Sol White, "Sol White's Column of Baseball Dope" *Cleveland Advocate*, 23 March 1919. This interest intensified as black baseball grew in popularity and as a business in the 1920s and 1930s. "Yanks Triumph Over Two White Teams, Sunday" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 May 1932; "Paige and Willis Do it Once More; Whip Big League Aces" *Chicago Defender*, 27 January 1934. Even the white press acknowledged the high stakes of such matches. "When Satch's boys tangle with big league barnstormers, there is no foolishness. They play in real earnest. The colored players do their best to show their class, while the whites don't like to be shown up." Shane, "Chocolate Rube Waddell," 81.

Chicago American Giants player, teams first utilized batting helmets during a game between a Negro League all-star team and a white semipro team from Texas.⁴⁰

Did you know Satchel Paige is the cause of ballplayers wearing plastic helmets today? In 1936 we had a Negro National League all-star team we took to Denver to play in the Denver *Post* tournament....We didn't lose a game. We won 7 straight games. And when we came up to play Borger, Texas, a white team—we were the only colored team in the tournament—these boys sent back to Borger, Texas, and had these helmets made to go around in their caps because they didn't want to get hurt with Satchel's speed.⁴¹

For African Americans, a win or a loss reflected upon the skill and prowess of their racial representatives on the field.⁴² Moreover, advocates for and against segregated baseball could (and did) use the results of such a contest in their arguments about the future of the major leagues.

⁴⁰ Leslie A. Heaphy documents a different origin for the batting helmet. "As the story is told Byrd [Bill, pitcher with Baltimore Elite Giants] is also in part responsible for the use of the batting helmet. He beamed Willie Wells, knocking him unconscious. The next time Wells faced Byrd he borrowed a hard-hat from a construction site to protect himself." Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues, 1869-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), 71; Willie Wells, interview by John Holway, Willie Wells Player File, NBHFM, 6. Buck O'Neil relates the same story about Wells in his memoir, *I Was Right on Time*, 144-145.

⁴¹ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 143. The *Denver Post* tournament had previously functioned as a segregated tournament, barring the Cuban Stars from participating. According to *The Crisis*, "Charles L. Parsons, sports editor of the Denver paper, who invited the Cubans to join the tournament, reneiged when protest came pouring in from the baseball moguls in three of the larger Southern cities." "No Negroes Allowed" *Crisis* 39 (August 1932), 263. In 1934, the tournament permitted the Kansas City Monarchs to participate. "K.C. Monarchs Leave to Start Drills in South" *Chicago Defender*, 21 April, 1934.

⁴² In 1919, Sol White noted the way in which a biased umpire could alter the outcome of such contests. According to White, pitcher Emmit Bowman lost a game against the white Philadelphia Athletics due to "an error of judgment on the part of Rube Waddell [famous white major league pitcher], as umpire." Sol White, "Sol White's Column of Baseball Dope" *Cleveland Advocate*, 22 March 1919.

In the 1940s, with campaigns to integrate baseball becoming more public and insistent, the public, white and black, paid more attention to the outcome of such games.⁴³

⁴³ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 173-181. For a discussion of the Communist campaign for baseball integration, see Kelly Elaine Rusinack, "Baseball on the Radical Agenda: the Daily and Sunday Worker on the Desegregation of Major League Baseball, 1933 to 1947" (M.A. Thesis: Clemson University, 1995). The Communist Party of the United States publicly fought for the integration of major league baseball, frequently publishing columns and news articles in the *Daily Worker* that highlighted the inequities of the color line as well as leading public protests and circulating petitions. The leadership of the Communist Party theorized that they could increase their cache among African American workers by capitalizing on the central role of baseball in black life and advocating for a cause that most black workers passionately cared about. A number of black publications also publicly lobbied for integration, albeit on a smaller scale. Both the *Courier* and the *Crisis* queried white sportswriters for their opinions on major league baseball integration and printed the responses in an effort to document the 1930s more favorable atmosphere for ending the color line. The *Daily Worker* was significant, however, as the only white publication to champion the fight for integration during the 1930s. The black press did not welcome the assistance from the *Daily Worker* and distanced itself and black baseball from the Communist Party. In 1942, the *Defender* took a dig at the Communist campaign for baseball integration. In an article about the lack of major league tryouts for Negro League stars, the writer criticized the *Daily Worker*, arguing that the *Worker* and its editors were trying to take credit for starting the movement for baseball integration. "Baseball Season Over: No Big League Tryouts" *Chicago Defender*, 10 October 1942. Wendell Smith, a *Pittsburgh Courier* sportswriter and one of the key figures in the signing of Jackie Robinson, went so far as to berate the *Daily Worker*'s editors and writers for taking credit for major league integration. Smith argued that the involvement of the *Daily Worker* and the Communist Party actually slowed progress toward eliminating the color line. Wendell Smith, "The Sports Beat" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 August 1947. Similarly, Buck Leonard has contended that black baseball were uniformly unwilling to support the *Daily Worker*'s campaign. It is difficult to tell whether the players actually rejected the *Daily Worker*'s efforts at the time or if Leonard merely wished to distance himself and his fellow teammates from any possible affiliation

These articles were in addition to numerous others that highlighted the athletic prowess of black athletes and questioned the fairness of baseball's racial prohibition.⁴⁴ Within this context, the above tale spoke volumes to proponents of the integration of baseball. Paige, as the central figure, symbolized overwhelming power and ability on behalf of black baseball. The opposing team feared Paige to such an extent that they were unwilling to face him without unusual protection. For advocates of black baseball, this tale highlighted the immense ability and athletic prowess of Negro League players as well as the inherent fallacies of arguments for segregation that rested upon a belief in the athletic inferiority of African Americans. On the other hand, for those opposed to the breaking of the color line, this tale implied that black ball players would bring a dangerous element to the white major leagues.

Moreover, the African American press and many Negro League players related tales regarding individual competition between white and black baseball players. A famous story about Paige and Joe DiMaggio was one such tale. According to this story, white owners and managers so admired Paige that they required up and coming prospects

with the Communist Party. Buck Leonard, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 268-269. On the Communist Party's attempt to attract black workers in Chicago, see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 261-265.

⁴⁴ See for example, W. Rollo Wilson, "Many Players Should Make It" *Pittsburgh Courier* 4 March 1933; "Major Club Owners Who Welcome Negro Patrons Shouldn't Bar Players" *Pittsburgh Courier* 25 March 1933; W. Rollo Wilson, "The Could Make the Big Leagues" *The Crisis* (October 1934): 305-306; "Negro Players in Major League Baseball" *The Crisis* (April 1937): 112; Edwin B. Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice" *Opportunity* 14 (March 1936): 77-70; William A. Brower, "Time for Baseball to Erase the Blackball" *Opportunity* 20 (June 1942): 164-167.

to face Paige and prove their abilities against his pitching prowess. New York Yankee Joe DiMaggio faced this test as a young ball player.⁴⁵ According to an *Opportunity* article, “the Great Di Mag’s birth as a bona fide big leaguer came only when he secured a bingle [bunt single] off Paige.”⁴⁶ DiMaggio himself reportedly proclaimed “I know I can make the Yankees now” after his hit against Paige.⁴⁷ This story is one of the few that seems to have been embraced within both the public and hidden transcripts in much the same way. The white scout present at the game verified the story, claiming to have sent an urgent message to his employers at the Yankees to let them know that DiMaggio had successfully passed the Paige test.⁴⁸ In 1940, a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* would allude to the story by noting that DiMaggio had said that Paige was the best pitcher he had ever faced.⁴⁹ Black baseball and the black media claimed and repeated this story for some time during the blackball era.

For black baseball advocates, the Paige-DiMaggio story reinforced their belief in the athletic prowess of black athletes and hinted at the superiority of certain black ball players over white major leaguers. This story presents a very particular black athlete,

⁴⁵ DiMaggio made his major league debut on May 3, 1936 as a member of the New York Yankees. Richard Ben Cramer, *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero’s Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 87. Cramer does not include the story about the Paige-DiMaggio encounter in his biography.

⁴⁶ William A. Brower, “Time for Baseball to Erase the Blackball” *Opportunity* 20 (June 1942): 165.

⁴⁷ John Holway, “Introduction” in LeRoy (Satchel) Paige as told to David Lipman, *Maybe I’ll Pitch Forever: A Great Baseball Player tells the Hilarious Story Behind the Legend* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962, 1993), ix; Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 138.

⁴⁸ Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 138.

⁴⁹ Shane, “The Chocolate Rube Waddell,” 81.

Satchel Paige, as the symbolic litmus test for a man who became emblematic of white baseball in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁰ For DiMaggio, it was not the “official” pitching of the white baseball establishment that needed to be conquered, instead it was Satchel Paige’s pitching that would be his biggest obstacle to major league acceptance.⁵¹ The disparity between white baseball’s appreciation for Paige’s ability (to the extent that he would be such a great barometer of a white athlete’s future success in the major leagues) and their unwillingness to include him because of his skin color was yet another way that major league baseball weakened its own color line in the years preceding integration.

In other instances, white major league teams were reportedly too frightened to face the Negro Leaguers, particularly stars like Satchel Paige. According to Paige, he was offered 500 dollars to pitch for a semi-pro team in an exhibition game against the Pirates. The Pirates manager, however, refused to play once he heard Paige would be pitching. He reportedly declared: “Paige is too good for my boys at this stage of their training. Why, he might go out there and strike out sixteen or seventeen. Can you imagine what that would do to their morale?”⁵²

⁵⁰In 1921, the *Chicago Defender* heralded a new pitcher on Foster’s Chicago American Giants. The *Defender* printed a large picture of the pitcher, Lefty Starks, and noted that he had “struck the famous Babe Ruth out three times.” “New Addition to Rube Foster’s Pitching Staff” *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1921. This instance was a reverse of the Paige-DiMaggio situation. In the 1921 case, Starks was the unknown player while Ruth had already attained great popularity. As such, Starks proved himself through his performance against Ruth in the same way that DiMaggio proved his skill against Paige.

⁵¹ It is also notable that DiMaggio’s famous hit against Paige was not a homerun or an extra-base hit, instead it was a bunt single. The achievement of a bunt single against a strong pitcher does not imply the power or strength that a longer hit would have.

⁵² Paige, *Maybe I’ll Pitch Forever*, 97.

Courier sportswriter Chester Washington described the stakes for Pittsburgh and other under-performing major league teams in a similar manner. In his weekly column, Washington contrasted the lowly Pirates with the accomplished Grays: "Last Thursday the Pittsburgh Pirates lost their ninth straight game ...to New York's Giants... While making seven errors, they played ball like a bunch of sand-lotters. Then on Saturday we watched the Homestead Grays beat the New York Cubans 7-3 on the same spike-seared diamond. They were a hustling, scrappy team." Washington mulled a match between the two Pittsburgh clubs, but concluded it was unlikely:

The Pirates would have too much to lose to play the Homesteaders. If the Bucs won, there would be thousands of "I told you so's." But if they lost, the floundering Pirates couldn't afford the loss of caste and prestige which defeat would bring. They just couldn't take it. And it would prove too much of an economic boomerang at the gate.⁵³

Most stories regarding prohibitions against white major league teams playing against Negro League teams involved major league baseball commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis.⁵⁴ Landis, who ruled the major leagues with an iron fist and was credited with restoring public faith in baseball after the infamous Black Sox scandal of 1919, vehemently opposed the integration of the major leagues during his tenure, despite

⁵³ Washington, "Sez Ches': Why We Would Pick the Grays over the Pittsburgh Pirates."

⁵⁴ Landis was not the first baseball official to oppose barnstorming tours by major league teams. In 1911, after Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics had a disastrous showing against black teams in Cuba, American League president Ban Johnson prohibited American League teams from playing interracial games in Cuba. Individual team owners, including Charles Ebbets of the Brooklyn Dodgers, also at times forbid their players from competing on these barnstorming tours. These owners used a similar rationale, that the major leagues and individual teams would be embarrassed if the black teams prevailed over white major leaguers. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 68, 97.

public statements to the contrary.⁵⁵ Landis, however, did not stop at simply maintaining the color line under his immediate domain. Instead, Landis put a stop to the numerous off-season barnstorming games between major league and Negro League clubs. Landis declared that major league teams could not play against Negro League teams.⁵⁶ This mandate did not abate the desire of both white major leaguers and black ball players to compete in what had become immensely profitable ventures. In order to circumvent Landis's orders, the white players organized themselves into "all-star" teams, thus outside of Landis's control, and continued to stage games against the Negro League players.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 98. Landis claimed that there was no rule barring African American players from the major leagues. Yet as a contemporary sportswriter noted in 1942, "If Judge Landis says there is no rule against Negroes in organized baseball, then you can bet the last coupon your gas rationing card that Negroes are not barred from organized baseball. But don't risk a single gallon on a bet that Negroes will ever get into organized baseball." Whitey Gruhler, "Sports Comments" *Atlantic City Press-Union*, 24 July 1942. One sport historian has speculated that Landis opposed baseball integration due to his fear that black major leaguers would become romantically involved with white female groupies. The author, Jean Hastings Ardell, attributed Landis's fear of interracial romances with black athletes to the fact that he presided over Jack Johnson's federal grand jury trial on Mann Act charges. See Ardell, "Baseball Annies, Jack Johnson, and Kenesaw [sic] Mountain Landis" *Nine* 13 (February 2005): 103-109.

⁵⁶ Cool Papa Bell interview, NBHFM, 12; Hilton Smith, interview by John Holway, Hilton Smith Player File, NBHFM, 27; Buck Leonard tape, Buck Leonard file, NBHFM, 5; Red Moore, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 52. See also Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 122,

⁵⁷ Charlie Biot, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 95. At least one major league team staged a game in spite of the prohibition. The Philadelphia Phillies competed against the Hilldales of the Eastern Colored League in 1923. Ribowsky, *A Complete History*, 122. Some major leagues players simply

Generally, when Negro League players or black sportswriters related or referenced Landis's decision, they noted that it was the great success of the Negro League teams against white major leaguers that caused Landis to outlaw such matchups.⁵⁸ Willie Wells, for example, noted "we won all our games against them [major leaguers in 1935]. We won twenty-one straight. Judge Landis stopped it after that, wouldn't let us play any more that winter. Said it was a disgrace."⁵⁹ Consequently, the triumphs of black ball over major league ball had enormous implications. Through their victories, black baseball players were able to symbolically intimidate the very man who prevented them from playing in the major leagues. Even though their wins against the major leaguers did not speed integration, they struck a blow against the Jim Crow beliefs of white baseball.

Black baseball players also signified upon racial stereotypes and hierarchies through the selective use of nicknames. Nicknames were particularly important to African American players and the larger African American community. In his book, *Baseball Nicknames*, James Skipper asserted the importance of nicknames. According to Skipper, baseball fans equated baseball with innocence, democracy, and pseudo-

competed under "assumed names" in order to continue the barnstorming contests. Cool Papa Bell interview, NBHFM, 19.

⁵⁸ Cool Papa Bell, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 117; Willie Wells, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 225; William "Sug" Cornelius, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 237.

⁵⁹ Willie Wells, interview by Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 225.

amateurism in the first half of the twentieth century. Owners paid their players, but the public expected baseball players to compete for the love of the game rather than for material compensation. These expectations, Skipper argues, led fans to transform professional baseball players into modern day “folk heroes”—a designation that helped to cement the identification of the working class with baseball players.⁶⁰

Extending Skipper’s argument to the African American community magnifies the importance of this phenomenon. African American ball players were in an even more precarious situation than white players regarding their professional status. Negro League players competed under a system that prohibited them from reaching the major leagues. Although some superstars, such as Paige, eventually achieved significant salaries, the living and playing conditions in the Negro Leagues were fraught with difficulties that white players rarely, if ever, had to encounter.

Unlike the situation with white baseball players, however, African Americans did not expect Negro League players to toil without pay. In fact, black members of the sporting press were more likely to herald large contracts as a sign of black baseball’s value and success. Due to a more freewheeling contractual system and the constant addition and deletion of new teams and regional leagues, Negro League players were able to capitalize on one advantage they possessed that major leaguers did not—the ability to push team owners into a bidding war for their services. Despite the presence of a reserve clause, the continual flux of the Negro League system as well as the demand for black players from Latin and Caribbean teams resulted in unprecedented freedom for black ball players. These players could quite easily escape an unattractive contract by joining a

⁶⁰ James Skipper, *Baseball Nicknames* xvii-xviii.

team outside the League or by joining a team in another country. Not surprisingly, the great Satchel Paige was one of the most successful in this type of maneuvering. Paige rarely spent more than one season with a team, and at times, even switched among teams during the season. In one of the most infamous examples of Paige's business dealings, he negotiated a deal with Dominican Republic dictator, Rafael Trujillo. Paige agreed to head a team of all-star Pittsburgh Crawford players for a two-month season in the Dominican Republic in order to boost Trujillo's political popularity. For his services, Paige received a salary of \$3000 for two months of work during the Depression.⁶¹

Paige was not alone in his savvy business dealings. Numerous players took advantage of the talent-hungry Mexican and Latin American clubs.⁶² If a player felt an

⁶¹ Paige had been under contract to Gus Greenlee and the Pittsburgh Crawfords at the time. Greenlee was understandably upset that his most valuable players fled to the Dominican Republic at the beginning of the 1937 season, leaving him without much of a team. Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 224. The experience in the Dominican Republic was not a pleasant one for Paige and his teammates. The players were heavily guarded and at times, feared for their lives if they were to lose a game. Paige related stories about his time that revolved around the team being jailed before games and playing under the purview of heavily armed soldiers. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, 225; Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 136; University of Missouri-St. Louis, Oral History Program. Oral History Interview with James "Cool Papa" Bell, September 8, 1971, transcript, in "Cool Papa" Bell player file, Ashland Collection, National Baseball Hall of Fame, 29.

⁶² "Majors' Baseball Bar Drove Paige to Cuba" *Chicago Defender*, 29 May 1937; "Wells Fails to Join Newark" *Chicago Defender*, 22 April 1944; "McKinnis, Pennington, Douglas Jump to Mexico" *Chicago Defender*, 27 April 1946. Owners attempted to enforce rules against jump by instituting severe penalties. These measures rarely worked, as team owners were frequently willing to defy the league in order to gain the talents of players like Paige and Wells. See Cum Posey, "Sportive Realm" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 January 1927; "Negro Leagues Adopt Constitution of Majors" *Chicago Defender*, 22 December 1945.

owner offered an inadequate contract, the offended player left the team and the country to play south of the border for handsome compensation. Players who played in Cuba or Mexico also benefited from the superior race relations in those countries.⁶³ African American ballplayers found their new homes to be incredibly inviting. According to Willie Wells, who spent much of his time in the Mexican league, “[p]layers on the teams in the Mexican league live just like big leagues. We have everything first class...I mean that we are heroes here, and not just ball players...I came back to Mexico...because I’ve found freedom and democracy here...Here in Mexico, I am a man.”⁶⁴ For players like Wells, life in Mexico, Cuba, and other Latin American countries provided immense relief from living by the rules of Jim Crow.

Despite the opportunity for black players to find a better contract with another team, the economics of the Negro Leagues dictated that even the superstars of black baseball earned less than their white counterparts. Moreover, most players were unwilling to leave their families and their home country on a permanent basis in order to enjoy the less restrictive racial atmosphere of Latin America or the Caribbean. Thus, the

⁶³ Buck Leonard singled out Puerto Rico and Venezuela as being accommodating. “There was not any racial discrimination at all in those two countries.” Leonard, *Buck Leonard*, 203. Similarly, Wilmer Fields noted that in Puerto Rico, “Segregation was not an issue...we went to movies and restaurants freely, and when I was on the baseball field, no unpleasant words were directed at me.” Wilmer Fields, *My Life in the Negro Leagues* (Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1992), 33.

⁶⁴ Jim Reisler, *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who covered the Negro Leagues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994), 45–46. See also, Andrew “Pullman” Porter, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 24; Buck O’Neil, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 67; Art Pennington, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues*, 79.

challenging circumstances of black ball players' tenure in professional baseball meant that they, more than white players, played in spite of hardships. The public's awareness of the vulnerability of and problems faced by black baseball players contributed to a great sense of attachment and identification.

The tales of trickster passing had their equivalent in nicknames of both teams and individual players called into question racial categorization in general. The color line has always been a shifting one that historical actors have had difficult time pinning down. Team nicknames also were significant for the African American community and Negro League players. Many teams chose to use the name "Giants." The "Giants" had special meaning for the African American community for two reasons. First, the New York Giants were one of the more successful major league teams in the first decades of the twentieth century. Thus, by claiming the name of such a prominent major league club, the team owners and players were asserting their own athletic prowess, publicly claiming all of the connotations of what it meant to be a baseball "Giant" for themselves and for their race. Second, John McGraw, manager of the Giants, publicly praised the abilities of African American players on many occasions and in at least one instance, attempted to sign and play an African American player in a major league game. Yet, because of his attempt to use an African American player and his well-known admiration for the athletic promise of other African American players, the name "Giants" also came to stand for the possibility of integrated major league baseball. As a result, "Giants" signified the past hypocrisy and discrimination of the major leagues and a defiant optimism for the future.

As African Americans supported campaigns for the integration of baseball, they closely observed Cuban and Indian players and teams. Because Cubans and Indians

tended to have dark complexions, there was a hope that the inclusion of Cubans and Indians might pave the way for African American players.⁶⁵ It was within this context, that Negro League teams “Cuban” as their name. Historians have taken this action in various ways, seeing it as both a code that would alert the public to the fact that an advertisement referred to a Negro League club as well as an outward sign of the hope for better race relations. Many African Americans viewed Cuba and other Latin American countries as racially tolerant in comparison to the United States.⁶⁶ *Half-Century Magazine* lauded Cuba as a site of relative racial harmony in a 1919 article. “In Cuba no color line is drawn. Colored players from the United States often go there to play and have yet to encounter any discrimination on account of their color.”⁶⁷ Moreover,

⁶⁵ It should be noted that only light skinned Indians and Cubans played major league baseball. Dark-skinned players found themselves as part of the Negro Leagues. Moreover, these players had to learn to adjust the racial climate of early twentieth century America. According to a contemporary magazine, “Some of the Cubans have doubtless felt the sting of being a human being in the United States with distinct Negro features.” *Half-Century Magazine* October 1919, 8.

⁶⁶ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 61.

⁶⁷ “The Cuban Stars Baseball Team” *Half-Century Magazine*, October 1919, 8. In 1940, as the *Courier* and other publications focused on the integration of major leagues, sportswriter Chester Washington lamented the flow of black baseball talent to Latin and South America. Washington and his contemporaries were no longer content to merely applaud other nations’ more progressive racial climates in the hope of inspiring domestic change. Instead, they underscored the hypocrisy of the color line and the unfair realities of life for African Americans under Jim Crow. Washington mused “The thought which struck the writer most forcefully Saturday was that in this so-called land of Opportunity how tragic it was that the greatest home run hitter in the game today—Josh Gibson—had to leave his native America to make a lucrative living in far-away Venezuela just because the Negro League can’t afford to pay him the salary he’s worth

numerous ballplayers recalled both Cuba and Mexico as more comfortable places to live. Max Manning boasted that he loved playing in Cuba because he had unlimited access within the country, “[w]hen I was in Cuba, I lived in the best part of Cuba.”⁶⁸ Manning added that the athletic facilities in Cuba were superior to those utilized by the Negro Leagues in the States. Similarly, Art Pennington described Mexico as “freedom,” a country where the people did not “think about no [sic] color.”⁶⁹ For Manning and others, competing in Latin America was the fulfillment of a dream.⁷⁰ By utilizing the name “Cuban,” African American ballplayers, owners, and managers could invoke thoughts of a more tolerant nation.⁷¹

and the major leagues bar him because he is black.” Washington, “If Doors Were Open Men Like Gibson Wouldn’t be in Venezuela” *Pittsburgh Courier* 18 May 1940.

⁶⁸ Pennington, interview by Kelley, *Voices from the Negro Leagues and Conversations with 52 Baseball Standouts of the Period 1924-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1998), 71.

⁶⁹ Kelley, *Voices From the Negro Leagues*, 77. Pennington also noted that conditions drastically changed as he traveled by train to the United States. Pennington and his new (white) wife were harassed by passengers and rail workers on their trip from Laredo, Texas to Little Rock, Arkansas.

⁷⁰ Sug Cornelius, another Negro League player, noted that Mexico was largely devoid of racial problems until 1939, at which point Cornelius argued that the increasing presence of American tourists made Mexico a less pleasant destination for Negro Leaguers. Cornelius attributed the turn in racial attitudes among Mexicans to the desire by the Mexican tourist industry to cater to white Americans. Holway, *Voices from the Great Negro Leagues*, 236.

⁷¹ Negro League players also participated in barnstorming through Canada. Although these players were generally treated well by locals, they [black teams] also had to emphasize racial difference. Thus, Canada was not viewed as the utopia that Cuba and Mexico were. “In order to attract fans, the often had to cultivate an image of ‘otherness’ that played upon white racial theories about the different characteristics of the races.” Howell, *Sandlots*, 173.

Both of these arguments are valid, but they also point to another concurrent meaning. Assuming the name “Cuban” once again challenged the notion that one could easily attach racial labels to a diverse population.⁷² In particular, highlighting the Cuban situation, allowed African Americans to challenge the arbitrary nature of one-drop laws that labeled one as black based on any black ancestry. Cubans and Mexicans, in contrast, were classified “white” or “black” merely on a visual determination. A Cuban with light skin was white, one with dark skin was black.⁷³ Of course, color determination was selective; Elite Giants official Dick Powell recalled the Boston Braves expressing interest in Cuban shortstop before deciding that “he was just a *little* too dark.”⁷⁴ By giving nicknames that mocked the strict racial line of segregated baseball, Negro League players made an implicit argument that race was too ambiguous to be an obstacle for inclusion in the “national game.”

There is yet another significant explanation for the popularity of teams using either “Cubans” or “Giants” for their nicknames. The popularity of these names can not

⁷² For a discussion of baseball’s influence on Cuban identity, see Perez, *Becoming Cuban*.

⁷³ Despite the fact that major league baseball admitted light skinned Cubans, Cuban players in the major league faced discrimination and harsh treatment. “Cuban Ball Players on Washington Senators Snubbed by Own Team Mates,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 June 1940. The *Courier* writer noted that the dismal treatment of Cuban players indicated that black ball players would not be accepted into the white major leagues. “So the question of the dark-skinned brother in the big leagues is answered by the comment on the Cubans of various abilities that have been on the Washington club roster for the past two season. And any question as to the “possibilities” of Negroes in the big leagues has its answer in the statements attributed to the manager who came from Pennsylvania’s coal mines and was given an opportunity as a second baseman in Washington.”

⁷⁴ Powell, interview by Kelley, *Negro Leagues Revisited*, 87.

be understated. A perusal of the *Chicago Defender* reveals the pervasiveness of these names. In the July 1915 sports page in the *Defender*, the newspaper listed the baseball games to be played that weekend by black baseball teams in Chicago as well as results from the previous week's games. Among the teams mentioned were the *Cubans*, the *Cuban Stars*, the *American Giants*, the *Chicago Giants*, the *Union Giants*, the *Lincoln Giants*, the *New York Giants*, the *Keystone Giants*, and the *Long Branch Cubans*.⁷⁵ Similarly, a 1932 edition of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* featured an advertisement for a championship game between Conner's New Bacharach Giants and the Pettus' Richmond Giants. The extreme popularity of these names leads to an alternative explanation to the ones given above.

One of the earliest African American baseball teams was the Cuban Giants. The Cuban Giants who "dominated black baseball in its infancy," were primarily composed of waiters working at a Long Island resort named the Argyle Hotel.⁷⁶ Historians have been unclear about the reason for the names, which preceded both McGraw's interaction with black baseball and the acceptance of light skinned Cuban players in the white major leagues. Michael Lomax has suggested that the name "Cuban" was intended to reflect the skin tone of most of the players and their higher class status.

There were two characteristics that linked them to the mulatto elite—occupational status and skin color. Both Frank Thompson (headwaiter) and Bud Fowler (barber) worked in occupations commonly associated with the black middle-class....In terms of skin color, virtually every player, not to mention those who

⁷⁵ *Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1915, 7, emphasis mine. In his autobiography, Buck O'Neil, famous Negro Leaguer, compiles an even longer list of baseball "Giants," listing 23 teams using the name Giants. O'Neil notes that he was a Giant three different times in his career. O'Neil, *I Was Right On Time*, 40-41.

⁷⁶ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 34-35.

played in Organized Baseball, were light skinned blacks. Thus the name "Cuban" was for their light skin.⁷⁷

Lomax then suggests that the name Giants resulted from the fact that the team was a consolidation of smaller hotel based teams.

Regardless of the origin of the name "Cuban Giants," the vast success of the team resulted in immense popularity of the name. A contemporary team went so far as to christen his club the "Cuban X Giants," leading to a lawsuit by the original Cuban Giants over copyright infringement.⁷⁸ By 1915, the majority of teams in the Chicago area had names containing some variation on the "Cuban Giants." Consequently, teams using the terms "Cuban" or "Giants" not only called up connotations of the New York Giants and Cuban major leaguers, but also a long legacy of success for black baseball. By referencing that cultural history, African Americans were able to connect with a legacy of independent achievement. As campaigns to encourage African Americans to "buy black" increased with the growing number of African Americans in the North during the Great Migration, a connection to such a legacy had significance for much of the black population. Moreover, as Rube Foster took control of the Negro National League and emphasized black ownership of black teams, the self-reliance of these teams, in a long line of successful ventures, signified the wisdom of such policies. In essence, repeating the use of the names "Cuban" and "Giants" reinforced collective memories and

⁷⁷ Michael Lomax, "Black Baseball, Black Community, Black Entrepreneurs: The History of the Negro National and Eastern Colored Leagues, 1880-1930" (PhD diss, Ohio State University, 1996), 76.

⁷⁸ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 35.

established the visibility of black baseball in a country where the majority of the population ignored its existence.

In the 1920s, a number of black baseball players acquired individual nicknames that also referenced the ambiguity of racial classification. Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, adherents of eugenics and other racial hierarchy systems spent considerable time and effort trying to compose racial systems that could somehow quantify race and have some “scientific” measures by which one could judge race, efforts which resulted in racial purity or “one drop” laws. The ambiguity of racial categories coupled with the strong desire by authorities to police those categories in spite of the inherent difficulties placed increasing burdens on African Americans in particular. As it became more and more difficult to define the races through intelligence tests, visual identification, ancestry, and athletic abilities, Americans began to accept a more dichotomous racial system, one in which the line between black and white was the most significant division.⁷⁹ Baseball was one of the earliest institutions (outside the South) to abide by this dual racial system, allowing men of all races to participate except for African Americans. A 1923 *Sporting News* editorial described the situation:

In Organized Baseball there has been no distinction raised except tacit understanding that a player of Ethiopian descent is ineligible—the wisdom of which we will not discuss except to say that by such a rule some of the greatest

⁷⁹ On eugenics and racial classification see, Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 1995); Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Richard B. Sherman “‘The Last Stand’; The Fight for Racial Integrity in Virginia in the 1920s,” *Journal of Southern History* 54 (February 1988): 69-92; David J. Smith, *The Eugenic Assault on America: Scenes in Red, White, and Black* (Fairfax, Va: George Mason University Press, 1993)

players the game has ever known have been denied their opportunity. No player of any other "race" has been banned. We have had Indians, Chinese and Japanese playing ball and if a Malay should appear who could field and hit he would probably be welcomed.⁸⁰

Negro League players were acutely aware of the fact that the major leagues welcomed those of other races and ethnicities and only excluded African Americans and dark-skinned Cubans and Mexicans.⁸¹

Negro League players often played with racial categories in the development of nicknames for their lighter skinned teammates. Two of the more common nicknames for those African American players were "Red" or "Chief." Players were given Spanish names indicating that they could potentially pass for Cuban rather than black or indicating that they were Cuban, but of too dark of a complexion to be allowed to participate in the major leagues.⁸² Additionally, at least one Negro League player

⁸⁰ Dean A. Sullivan, *Middle Innings: A Documentary History of Baseball, 1900-1948*, 120.

⁸¹ In 1936, the *Chicago Defender* observed that the major leagues would include on their rosters "all nationalities save members of the Race. There, knowingly, will be no black boys." "Sox and Cubs" *Chicago Defender*, 16 January 1936. See also, "Negro Baseball," *The Brown American*, Fall-Winter 1942, 5, 13, 19-20.

⁸² Two light-complexioned Cuban players, Rafael Almeida and Armando Marsans, joined the Cincinnati Reds in 1911. Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 61. For other Cubans, skin tone determined their fate. "Nationality could obscure racial categories but only up to a point, beyond which considerations of color prevailed. And it was precisely color that barred many of the greatest Cuban ballplayers from reaching the major leagues." Perez, *Becoming Cuban*, 266. For a discussion of the experiences of Afro-Cuban and Caribbean players who competed in the United States during segregation, see Adrian Burgos Jr. "Playing Ball in a Black and White Field of Dreams": Afro-Caribbean Ballplayers in the Negro League 1910-1950" *Journal of Negro History* 82 (Winter, 1997): 67-104.

obtained a nickname similar to the name of an Indian major league ball player. Harold “Yellowhorse” Morris, a player for the Detroit Stars among other teams, was known as “Yellowhorse” in reference to Mose Yellowhorse. The original “Yellowhorse” was a Pawnee native who had two successful years with the Pittsburgh Pirates in the early 1920s.⁸³ Through these ethnic nicknames, black baseball players referred to the hypocrisy of racial binarism in major league baseball. Thus, they signified to their African American fans, by communicating their knowledge of the ambiguous and problematic definitions of race.

For African Americans, the use of racially ambiguous nicknames had greater symbolism due to the open secret that black players had passed the white color line. W. Rollo Wilson, sportswriter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted in a 1924 column that contemporary athletes were passing as white and others had successfully done so in the past.⁸⁴ According to Wilson, African American fans and the black press had been

⁸³ Marshall Todd Fuller, “60 Feet 6 Inches and Other Distances From Home: A Creative Biography About Mose Yellowhorse, Baseball, Cartoons, and the Pawnee” (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1999), 58. Fuller does not provide any concrete evidence that Morris took the name “Yellowhorse” in order to cite the Pawnee baseball major leaguer. The timing of the two player’s careers indicates a likely connection. Morris started in the Negro Leagues in 1927, one year after original Yellowhorse’s last game.

⁸⁴ W. Rollo Wilson, “Eastern Snapshots” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 June 1924. Similarly, a 1942 *Chicago Defender* article noted that African Americans had played in the big leagues, passing as white on the basis of their light skin. According to the article, a contemporary rumor alleged that “the Chicago Cubs had an infielder once recently was wasn’t exactly a Caucasian.” “Baseball Season Over: No Big League Tryouts” *Chicago Defender*, 10 October 1942. Quite notably, a number of Babe Ruth’s contemporaries claimed that he was a black man passing as white. According to Ruth biographer Robert Creamer, “Ruth was called nigger so often that many people assumed he was indeed partly black and that at some point in time he, or

clamoring for an accomplished track and field star, Charles Brookins, to admit that he was black. Wilson, unlike his colleagues, felt that Brookins should be allowed to “be what he wants to be.” Moreover, Wilson claimed “we have known more than one big league ball player to ‘get away with it.’ One of the shining lights of the game today is whispered to have had a ‘dark’ past. And ‘Indian’ has been a disguise for several of our boys.”⁸⁵ Thus, although Wilson approved of Brookins “passing,” Wilson’s readers felt that Brookins needed to identify himself as African American in order to help advance the status of black athletes and African Americans in general.

Other nicknames signified the athletic triumphs of black baseball. One of the best, and earliest, examples of this trend was Andrew “Rube” Foster. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, “Rube” was a common nickname among white baseball players and was a derogatory term for someone from a rural background. “Rube” implied both ignorance and backwardness. Despite the mythology of baseball pastoralism, major league baseball teams operated in large urban centers and were in part a consequence of the urbanization of the United States around the turn of the century. Players assigned the name “Rube” to teammates who came from rural backgrounds in

an immediate ancestor, had managed to cross the color line. Even players in the Negro baseball leagues that flourished then believed this and generally wished the Babe, whom they considered a secret brother, well in his conquest of white baseball.” Robert W. Creamer, *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York: Fireside Books, 1974, 1992), 185. See also, Jim Reisler, *Babe Ruth: Launching the Legend* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 23. Undoubtedly, these rumors partially stemmed from Ruth’s mythic ascent from troubled reform school boy (a school that housed a large number of orphans) to baseball superstar. On Ruth’s childhood and enrollment at reform school, see Creamer, *Babe*, 28-32.

⁸⁵ W. Rollo Wilson, “Eastern Snapshots” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 June 1924.

order to reflect their displacement and difficult transition to urban life. “Rube” Foster, an ambitious and imposing man, did not fit the profile of an early twentieth century baseball “rube,” yet he carried this nicknames with him throughout his career as a player, owner, and Negro League official.

Foster, unlike other “rubes,” claimed his nickname by virtue of his athletic talent. In 1902, Foster beat “Rube” Waddell, one of the preeminent white pitchers of the day, in a pitching duel.⁸⁶ As a reward of sorts for his victory, Foster’s teammates dubbed him “Rube” and the nickname stuck. Thus, Foster signified or troped upon the accepted meaning of the name “rube,” adding his own meaning. By employing the name “Rube,” Foster could continually invoke a claim to athletic superiority over one of the major league’s best players. Foster and his teammates were able to repeatedly lay claim to the type of athletic success that was not supposed to be achievable for African Americans. Therefore, the public use of the name “Rube” for Foster was an attempt to point out the cracks in segregated baseball and the white supremacist theories that maintained that segregation.

Moreover, Foster’s complete acceptance of the name “rube” ensured that he would always be remembered for his defeat of Waddell. According to an article in *Half-Century Magazine*, Foster preferred to be identified as Rube. “ ‘Rube’ (for such I will unconsciously be calling him—for it is such that the baseball world knows him and it is his wish that that name pass on down in the athletic world.)”⁸⁷ By 1922, as chairman of

⁸⁶ Howard A. Phelps, “Sporting News” *Half-Century* March 1919, 8; Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 107

⁸⁷ Howard A. Phelps, “Sporting News” *Half-Century Magazine* March 1919, 8.

the National Association Professional Baseball Clubs, Inc., Foster billed himself in letterhead as “A. Rube Foster” and signed his correspondence the same way.⁸⁸ In fact, Foster commissioned his tombstone to read “A.R. Foster,” thus permanently inscribing Rube as a part of his name.⁸⁹ Foster’s use of his nickname reflected how he had become “Rube.” In other words, Foster carried with him, as part of his very identity, proof of his innate ability and a counterargument to the major league’s racist policies.

In the 1930s and 1940s, black sportswriters referred to some of the most well-known black baseball players with nicknames that drew attention to the arbitrary nature of the color line and that highlighted the athletic prowess of those players. Just as they published articles that proclaimed the superior talent of black baseball players, these writers also utilized nicknames that directly (and favorably) compared black ballplayers to famous white players. Writers crowned Josh Gibson as the Black Babe Ruth, while Buck Leonard was the Black Lou Gehrig. By appropriating the names of the most accomplished (and popular) white major leaguers, the black sports media called attention to the abilities of Negro Leaguers. These nicknames inherently argued that black players were equally as skilled as the best white players, thus providing an argument for the integration of major league baseball.

In at least one instance, a member of the white press used a similar nickname and comparison while covering the 1934 East-West All Star Game. Marvin McCarthy of the *Chicago Times* composed a largely complementary article about the black all-star game

⁸⁸ To W.T. Smith from A. Rube Foster, November 15th, 1922, Chicago, Illinois in “Rube” Foster file, National Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁸⁹ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 107.

under the headline “The Black Matty.” In this article, McCarthy argued that Paige’s skills rivaled those of legendary white pitcher Christy Matthewson. Although some of McCarthy’s imagery treaded the line between colorful commentary and racial stereotyping, his acknowledgment of Paige’s talent was clear.⁹⁰ Any reader of McCarthy’s article clearly understood that Paige was an athlete for the ages and that a black man could equal one of the great white pitchers. By employing the nickname the “Black Matty,” McCarthy (whether he realized it or not) provided another bit of fodder for those clamoring for major league integration. These nicknames underscored the quality of baseball performed in the Negro Leagues, thus elevating the status of the league and its players.

In the 1930s, team nicknames reflected a more pan-national perspective on the part of many African Americans. During this time, the Miami Clowns changed their name to the Ethiopian Clowns. This alteration coincided with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Historians of Negro League baseball have interpreted this name change in two different ways, either as an attempt to play up African heritage to white audiences in a minstrel show manner or as a strategy to capitalize on the publicity surrounding the invasion of Ethiopia to gain more attention for their team.⁹¹ Undoubtedly, the owners of the Ethiopian clowns envisioned financial improvement as a result of their name change. As discussed in Chapter Three, the name also reflected the growing dissatisfaction among African Americans with colonialism and an increasing interest in Pan-African causes.

⁹⁰ Ribowsky, *Don’t Look Back*, 106.

⁹¹ Chadwick, *When the Game was Black and White*, 94 and Colin Howell, *Sandlots- A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 176.

African Americans found frequent mention of the Ethiopian situation in the morning paper. The black press devoted a great deal of column space (second only to their coverage of heavyweight champion Joe Louis from during the period from 1933-1938) to the invasion of Ethiopia, highlighting the invasion as an important issue for all African Americans.⁹² Thus, the “Ethiopian” name signified a renewed political consciousness and a political protest against racist policies at home and abroad.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the very terms used as shorthand descriptions for white and black baseball reflected the stereotypes of the time and the obstacles encountered by black ballplayers. Commonly, sportswriters referred to white baseball as “organized baseball.” The term “organized” has a variety of implications particularly as a term meant to highlight contrast between white and black baseball.⁹³

Buck Leonard and other black baseball players objected to the use of “organized” as a descriptor for white baseball. In particular, Leonard chafed at the implicit notion that if white baseball was organized, black baseball must be somehow inferior. Leonard

⁹² According to St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton’s study of black newspapers, Joe Louis had an “incidence ranking” of 80 in regards to front page headlines and pictures during the time period. Haile Selassie, deposed leader of Ethiopia was second with an “incidence ranking” of 24. The authors give both Louis and Selassie the title of “Race Hero,” noting that Selassie was the “leader of nation which Negroes felt kinship, during attack by white nation, Italy.” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 403.

⁹³ Michael S. Kimmel has argued that Progressive reformers praised “organized sport” as activity that “would instill important moral values.” Here also, one can see the pejorative effect of labeling white baseball as “organized.” Kimmel, “Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920” *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, eds. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Press, 1990), 60.

noted that the Negro Leagues “were not disorganized, just unrecognized.”⁹⁴ For Negro League players anxious for acknowledgment of their teams and leagues, the designation of white baseball as “organized” merely reinforced the most derogatory assumptions about black baseball.

In 1940, *Saturday Evening Post* writer Ted Shane explicitly erased the history of the organized Negro Leagues. Discussing Satchel Paige’s career, life, and reputation as a “clown,” Shane noted that although African Americans had been playing baseball “since 1884...there had never been any attempts at organization.”⁹⁵ Shane’s article was full of inaccuracies and exaggeration, yet its widespread dissemination as part of a well-read magazine would have further perpetuated the myth of unorganized black baseball.

Black ballplayers strenuously objected to the term “sandlotters” used to describe black baseball for many of the same reasons. These terms set up a false and publicly damaging dichotomy between black and white baseball, defining the color line as one of ability rather than merely of skin color. Those who referred to white baseball as “organized” provided ammunition for critics who objected to the inclusion of black ball players in the major leagues on the basis that Negro League players were insufficiently professional. Moreover, the idea that the Negro Leagues were disorganized further fanned the flames of black sportswriters who were quick to criticize black fan behavior at games. This all-too-common designation of major league baseball as “organized” slowed

⁹⁴ Buck O’Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 139.

⁹⁵ Shane, “The Chocolate Rube Waddell,” 79.

progress toward integration, adding weight to the unwritten “gentlemen’s agreement” that prevented blacks from participating in major league baseball.⁹⁶

Through the use of nicknames and folktales, African Americans constructed cultural and social currency that signified upon the racial hierarchies of the time. By challenging the racial stereotypes and expectations of Jim Crow society, these men and women reinforced notions of cultural superiority and self-sufficiency while also attacking the foundations of racial discrimination. Thus through their selective use of both the public and hidden transcript, African Americans were able to fashion an alternative conception of black baseball.

Trickster tales and nicknames, much like ballparks, hotels, public morality, manhood ideals, and visual images, functioned as a space through which African Americans could negotiate black baseball during Jim Crow. Within these spaces, African Americans encountered and challenged contemporary conceptions of the color line, racial identity, and white supremacy. Through their performance of black baseball, as spectators, observers, and participants, African Americans contested the racist foundations of the segregated baseball and racial binarism.

⁹⁶ Robert K. Fitts has traced how this denial of the Negro League’s organization, and by extension, black baseball’s professionalism and athletic talent, continued after integration through the minimization of African American players’ Negro League background on baseball cards. Fitts argues that this intentional slight was part of a larger attempt to erase the history of segregated baseball, a history that was inconsistent with the ideals of democracy and meritocracy assumed to be integral to the national game. Fitts, “Baseball Cards and Race Relations” *Journal of American Culture* 18 (Fall 1994), 75-85, especially 80-81.

EPILOGUE

In the final analysis, the door opened too late for white major league baseball. The majority of white baseball fans never witnessed the speed of Cool Papa Bell or the power of Josh Gibson. Moreover, the integration of baseball spelled the demise of organized black baseball as an institution. The Negro Leagues held on for more than a decade, but never regained the status and importance it held during the golden years of black baseball. Yet, the consequences exceeded that of the dissolution of a sports league. For African Americans, the loss of the Negro Leagues was significant socially, culturally, politically, and economically.

Black fans lost not only the Negro Leagues, but also the leisure space they had established in their local baseball fields. Moreover, the death of the league was the end of a black business enterprise, one that contributed economically to African American communities. The major leagues were willing to profit from the addition of African American players but unwilling to filter those profits back into African American communities. Major league owners refused, with few exceptions, to even compensate

Negro League owners for the loss of their players. Instead, they dismissed Negro League contracts as insufficient and non-binding.¹

Politically, the integration of baseball was in part a token gesture. While it had been a major issue among those campaigning for racial equality and was a victory for the nascent civil rights movement, it did not eliminate racism in professional baseball.² Nor did it particularly speed the integration of public schools or transportation.

¹ Effa Manley led a one-woman public campaign to shame major league owners into recognizing the legitimacy of Negro League contracts. Unable to object to integration itself, for fear of losing fans, Manley instead sought monetary compensation for the loss of key players. See "Negro Club Head Chides Robinson" May 23, 1948; "Jackie 'Ungrateful to Negro Ball, Says Woman Club Owner'" *Sporting News* May 26, 1948 in Effa Manley File, Ashland Collection, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum; Effa Manley, interview by John Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: De Capo Press, 1992), 324; Effa Manley and Leon Herbert Hardwick, *Negro Baseball....Before Integration* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1976), 92; Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 213. Manley also vehemently responded to slights on the Negro League, including an *Ebony* article with Jackie Robinson, in which he painted an unflattering portrait of life in the Negro Leagues. Jackie Robinson, "What's Wrong With Negro Baseball?" *Ebony* June 1948. In addition to accusing Robinson of being "ungrateful and more likely stupid," Manley also argued that Branch Rickey was a less than scrupulous businessman, having failed to provide compensation to the Kansas City Monarchs when signing Robinson. "Effa Manley Answers Robinson's Criticism of Negro Baseball" *The Telegram*, 23 May 1948 in Effa Manley File, NBHFM.

² On this point, see Jules Tygiel, "Blackball: The Integrated Game" *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, & Baseball History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 110-113. Phillip M. Hoose argues that white coaches and managers refused to give African Americans positions such as catcher and pitcher that were central to on-the-field decision making. See *Necessities: Racial Barriers in American Sports* (New York: 1989).

During the two decades after integration, African American players remained a decided minority in baseball. Two of the most storied franchises in the major leagues, the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees resisted integration. The Red Sox refused to integrate until 1959- twelve years after Robinson's major league debut.³ The Cleveland Indians and Brooklyn Dodgers, clubs considered to be racially progressive and pioneering, maintained semi-official quotas, passing over more-qualified African American players in order not to increase the number of black players on their rosters.⁴ As late as the 1970s, Hank Aaron received racially motivated hate mail and death threats as he approached and passed Babe Ruth's lifetime homerun record.⁵

³ New York established an anti-discrimination law that some credited with forcing the Brooklyn Dodgers to sign Jackie Robinson and integrate. Yet, despite the existence of New York's anti-discrimination law and a similar measure in Massachusetts, the Yankees did not integrate until 1956 and the Red Sox held out until 1959. Henry D. Fetter, "The Party Line and The Color Line: The American Communist Party, the Daily Worker, and Jackie Robinson" *Journal of Sport History* 28 (Fall 2001): 383-384.

⁴ See Steve Treder, "The Persistent Color Line: Specific Instances of Racial Preference in Major League Player Evaluation Decisions After 1947" *Nine* 10 (Fall 2001): 1-30. Treder has also traced how race influenced personnel decisions on the New York (and later San Francisco) Giants under Horace Stoneham. See Treder, "A Legacy of What-If's: Horace Stoneham and the Integration of the Giants" *Nine* 10 (Spring 2002): 71-101.

⁵ For a discussion of Aaron's pursuit of the home record and the resultant racial unrest, see Sandy Tolan, *Me and Hank: A Boy and His Hero, Twenty-Five Years Later* (Free Press, 2000). On the difficulties encountered by African American baseball players after integration, see Arlene Howard and Ralph Wimbish, *Elston and Me: The Story of the First Black Yankee* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 19-52, 99-103; Larry Moffi and Jonathan Kronstadt, *Crossing the Line: Black Major Leaguers, 1947-1959* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994). Interestingly, among the liberal press, the

As a result of the poor treatment of black baseball players and the increased urbanization of African American populations, baseball's popularity has precipitously declined among black sports fans since integration.⁶ African American athletes and fans are much more likely to spend their leisure time on sports like basketball and football, rather than baseball. African American neighborhoods rarely contain sandlot baseball fields or sponsor local baseball clubs. Concrete basketball courts with metal rims have replaced grass baseball fields; young African American men practice lay-ups instead of taking batting practice.

In this dissertation, I have tried to illuminate the history of the Negro Leagues in order to recover a relationship between African Americans and baseball that has since been lost. To that end, I have explored the intersections between black baseball, segregation, black enterprise, and racial identity during Jim Crow. Because black baseball was immensely popular among African Americans and represented a public display of segregated leisure, the ways in which black baseball players, fans, writers, and owners performed baseball was significant. Traveling to and from games, African American fans and players navigated the physical terrain of black baseball, in familiar and unfamiliar locations. In the best case scenarios, fans and players occupied ballparks unmarked by the color line and were free to enjoy grandstand seats and unfettered access

Daily Worker explicitly ignored the racism black baseball players faced in the major leagues. As a communist publication, the *Daily Worker* was unwilling to portray white baseball players from a working class background in a negative light. On the *Daily Worker* after integration, see Fetter, "The Party Line and the Color Line," 389-390.

⁶ "Where Have You Gone, Jackie Robinson?: In College Baseball The Diamonds Are Almost All White" *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Summer 2001): 50-52.

to clubhouse showers. In many other instances, players and fans were forced to observe separate but unequal accommodations, relegated to the bleachers and refused service at restaurants and hotels. Within such a context, the black press highlighted the triumphs of the black baseball enterprise: black-owned parks, private Pullman cars, patronage by celebrities and the elite. On their frequent barnstorming tours, black players alternately accepted and challenged the color line— in some instances avoiding restaurants known to be hostile to African Americans and at other times transgressing racial boundaries by sending light-skinned teammates to obtain food and goods.

Similarly, the very conception of black manhood was the subject of debate and negotiation within the context of segregated baseball. Black sportswriters and owners hoped to advance the dual (and sometimes dueling) causes of integration and black enterprise by marketing black baseball players as gentleman and by showcasing the respectable nature of Negro League fans. African American baseball players, on the other hand, were unwilling to fully capitulate to the standards of conduct endorsed by their owners and writers. Instead, they sought a more modern conception of manhood, one that allowed for individuality and fun. While black baseball players continued to enjoy leisure in ways contrary to that of the “respectable,” the black press constructed unimpeachable public images for Negro League players in an attempt to secure greater civil rights for African Americans.

The New Negro manhood ideal of the interwar period manifested itself in other ways. African Americans used visual images in the black press, trickster tales, and nicknames to critique segregation and white supremacy. On the pages of the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and other black periodicals, photographs and editorial art

challenged everything from the supposed moral and athletic superiority of the white major leagues to gross racial stereotypes. Likewise, trickster tales and nicknames spoke to the injustices of racially-biased law enforcement, the ambiguities of the black/white racial binarism of the time, and the remarkable achievements of black athletes. Through these critiques, African Americans displayed their dissatisfaction with American racism and their desire to affect change.

In this study, I have attempted to fill some of the holes in our understanding of black baseball and its role in black communities. In essence, I have argued that the African American performance of baseball, physically, discursively, and visually, revealed a counter-narrative that challenged the underpinnings of segregated society.

Of course, there is still considerable work to be done. In particular, we know too little about the experiences of African American fans, especially working-class fans. Their voices are difficult to uncover, yet extraordinarily significant for a more complete picture of black baseball. I have attempted, wherever possible, to highlight the experience of African American fans as communicated through editorial letters and press descriptions of black baseball crowds. However, the extant evidence limits the degree to which one can extrapolate about the experience of African American fans.

Moreover, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the men who created the incredible pieces of editorial art for the black newspapers. These astute critics of early twentieth-century race relations are important historical subjects in their own right. Through this dissertation and further examinations of black baseball, we can gain a better window into how African Americans negotiated and challenged segregation in their pursuit of leisure.

Despite these limitations, this dissertation has expanded our understanding of the resistant and often political function of African American baseball. By using cultural studies methods to read the cultural products of black baseball, I have aimed to uncover how African Americans used baseball to further the cause of black enterprise and eventually integration. Most crucially, African Americans imbued baseball cultural products with meanings that countered Jim Crow.

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Photo File: Leonard, Walter Fenner "Buck"

Photo File: Lloyd, John Henry

Photo File: Paige, Leroy Robert "Satchel"

Photo File: Rogan, Wilbur "Bullet Joe"

Photo File: Smith, Hilton.

Photo File: Stearnes, Norman Thomas "Turkey"

Photo File: Wells, Willie James

Photo File: Williams, Joe "Smokey"

Player File: Banks, Ernest

Player File: Bell, James Thomas

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VITA

Sarah Lorraine Trembanis

Sarah Lorraine Trembanis was born in Steubenville, Ohio on February 11, 1977. In 1995, she graduated as valedictorian of Toronto High School (Toronto, Ohio). After high school, she attended Duke University (Durham, North Carolina). She received a Bachelor of Arts in History, with honors, in May of 1999.

Sarah Trembanis enrolled at The College of William and Mary in August 1999. She received her Master of Arts in History in August 2002. In 2003, she passed her comprehensive examinations and became a Ph.D. candidate in American history. Sarah Trembanis successfully defended her dissertation in August 2006.